

# Emily's Empire:

Emily Dobson and the National Council of Women of  
Tasmania, 1899-1939

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## Abbreviations

AOT	Archives Office of Tasmania
FWSFC	Federation of Women's Societies for Film Censorship
HDNA	Hobart District Nursing Association
ICW	International Council of Women
JP	Justice of the Peace
MCL	Ministering Children's League
MHA	Member of the House of Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
NCW	National Council of Women
NCWA	National Council of Women of Australia
NCW NSW	National Council of Women of New South Wales
NCW NZ	National Council of Women of New Zealand
NCWQ	National Council of Women of Queensland
NCW SA	National Council of Women of South Australia
NCWT	National Council of Women of Tasmania
NCWV	National Council of Women of Victoria
NCW WA	National Council of Women of Western Australia
OBE	Order of the British Empire
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Protection from Cruelty to Animals
UTA	University of Tasmania Archives
WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union
WSA or WHA	Women's Sanitary Association or Women's Health Association
WSL	Womanhood Suffrage League
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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## Abstract

Tasmanian women began to assert their right to participate in the public sphere in the mid 1880s and this continued into the mid-1930s even though this period, labelled as first wave feminism, is traditionally dated to 1914 in the western world. The National Council of Women of Tasmania (NCWT), established in 1899, was an umbrella organisation made up of delegates from affiliated organisations. Its stated aim was to establish a dialogue between women's organisations working for the betterment of the community and to co-ordinate their activities, but in practice this was not always the case. Between 1904 and 1934 the NCWT was under the presidency of Emily Dobson, a formidable woman, who perhaps helped and perhaps hindered the work of the Council. Emily Dobson's agenda became the Council's and for thirty years she appeared to manipulate this most influential of Tasmanian women's organisations.

Although the Council's objective was to produce discussion in the philanthropic community, this did not stop it from trying to work in the community through challenging the status quo for women, influencing legislation and implementing programmes designed to help women and children. These attempts at work did not amount to much. The NCWT produced little that could be called a tangible achievement in the forty year period studied. This causes some problems in the analysis of the Council. If it had attempted no work then it could easily be concluded that it only meant to act as a facilitator for discussion between other organisations. Because it did attempt work and apparently failed in several areas, then the Council must be viewed differently.

But the importance of the National Council is not simply shown in the work it did or did not produce. The National Council was critical for both the evolution of feminism in Tasmania and in the personal evolution of its women members. It was women like the National Council members who were conservative and determined to work within the male system rather than challenge that system, who were able to pave the way for the second wave of feminism. The National Council of Women of Tasmania under the firm hand of Emily Dobson was among the first proponents of women's rights in Tasmania and the importance of this should not be dismissed.

## Introduction

This thesis focuses on the activity of Tasmania's largest and most representative women's organisation of the twentieth century and the interaction and domination of one woman who led it for thirty years. It explores the complex relationship between Emily Dobson and the National Council of Women of Tasmania (NCWT) while examining the work undertaken during the period known as first wave feminism and into the inter-war years. This thesis argues that although the tangible achievements of the National Council appear minor in relation to the forty years in which it worked, it was not the intention of the Council to produce work itself but rather act as a facilitator for the existing women's organisations of Tasmania so that a dialogue of women's activity could be established.

The National Council of Women of Tasmania was formed in 1899 and continues today. It was an umbrella organisation which in 1899 encompassed thirty-two of Tasmania's most influential political, philanthropic, temperance and health care related organisations. From its beginning the Tasmanian Council worked to bring these organisations together and to combine and focus efforts on contemporary issues. Emily Dobson was vice-president of the Council in 1899 and became president in 1904, a position she held until her death in 1934. It is argued that for many years Emily Dobson controlled and manipulated the agenda of the NCWT to suit her own ideals and interests. Her pre-eminence as president was never contested and any rivalry with other women was minimal.

The first wave of feminism is said to have existed in Australia from 1880 until 1914. Women involved in this movement were part of a white, educated elite who lived in the major centres. About one half of Australian feminists were either widows or spinsters. These women spoke for the conditions and needs of their less privileged white sisters and for middle-class women in general.<sup>1</sup> Early feminists were driven by a series of grievances and events; for example the shift to a 'family wage' economy which induced

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<sup>1</sup> K. Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism 1880-1914', K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds.), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville, 1992) p. 325



men and women to look for work outside the family circle. New opportunities for the higher education and intellectual growth of middle-class women were also a factor. In the cities the balance of the sexes and the declining birth rates sustained the rise of the independent 'new woman'. During the 1890s political changes took place and feminism became an integral element in the heightened political and cultural debate.<sup>2</sup>

This combination of factors, as noted by Katie Spearritt, was labelled 'First Wave Feminism', but this was a term given to the period retrospectively by the 'Second Wave Feminists' to describe the previous struggle for rights and concessions to womanhood. The term 'feminism' was used in the early twentieth century, but mainland women preferred terminology such as the 'woman question' and the 'women's movement'. The term 'feminist' was not often used of Tasmanian women. Spearritt says that more than any other word 'feminism' covers the range of ideas during this period and she uses it in a general way to describe any woman active in the public sphere between 1880 and 1914.<sup>3</sup> But the term 'feminism' if it be used to describe the mainland Australian women's movement, should be cautiously used in Tasmania, if at all. Judith Allen, in her article 'The Feminisms of the Early Women's Movements, 1850-1920', discusses the different forms of feminism that were prevalent in the western world.<sup>4</sup> She divides 'feminism' into three categories which are helpful in distinguishing the difference between Tasmanian and mainland women.

The first group Allen uses is what she calls 'private sphere feminism'. Women who fitted into this category believed in the intrinsic division in society into male and female, public and private, but objected to the subjection of women within the private sphere. Equality was thought to mean women's achievements in the private sphere and men's achievements in the public sphere. The typical activities of this group were in legal

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<sup>2</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', p. 325

<sup>3</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', p. 328

<sup>4</sup> J. Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement, 1850-1920', *Refractory Girl*, no. 17 March 1979, p. 11

reforms such as property rights for married women and equality in marriage. This group of women was not prevalent in either Tasmania or mainland Australia.<sup>5</sup>

The second category Allen uses is 'public sphere feminism'. This group refused to accept divisions in society based on sex. They disputed claims that areas such as politics were inherently that of men and therefore the suffrage became the most central demand of this group. These women, although also involved in some private sphere campaigns, were primarily suffragists. These women were more common to mainland Australia and were not seen in the Tasmanian women's movement.<sup>6</sup>

The third category used by Allen describes most adequately the Tasmanian women's movement. She termed this group 'expediency feminism'. These women accepted the theory of separate spheres for men and women but they saw that men could not totally represent their interests in the public sphere. This was particularly clear in discussions of sexual morality, and a double standard that men had an interest in maintaining. This group believed that for their own protection, women needed the vote. It was because of their difference from men that men could not adequately represent their interests and the vote was necessary. The vote for these women did not mean an entry into the public sphere and equal rights but merely a voice in issues which affected women and children. Their work in the public sphere was partial and expedient and involved only limited areas of interest.<sup>7</sup> This was the most common category of feminism in Australia and the only kind in Tasmania. Tasmanian women became involved in the woman question, not because they wanted to, but because they felt they had to. This type of feminism was more prevalent in Tasmania because of the conservative nature of the Tasmania women's movement. Due to isolation from mainland Australia and a limited population, Tasmanian women were not at the cutting edge of feminist activity and did not produce such radical leaders as on the mainland.

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<sup>5</sup> Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement', p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement', p. 11

<sup>7</sup> Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement', p. 11

On mainland Australia the woman question was more of an issue than in Tasmania. But both on the mainland and in Tasmania, the external evidence of this shift in the role of women, whatever the cause, was the creation of women's clubs and societies. In Tasmania these organisations were generally social, philanthropic, or religious while the mainland experienced a more diverse range including suffrage leagues and workers' unions which provided an organisational focus and recruiting ground for advocates of women's advancement.<sup>8</sup> In this new growth of women's organisations, temperance organisations became important as one of the first forms of women's public activism.<sup>9</sup> In Tasmania the WCTU, one of the first women's organisations established, agitated for the suffrage. It was temperance organisations such as the WCTU which began to add political interests to their agendas in the form of demands for local option or prohibition.<sup>10</sup>

Spearritt claims that feminist ideas gained ground in Australia through both formal and informal mediums such as public discussions on the 'woman question'. On the mainland women had access to local women's journals such as *Dawn* created by Louisa Lawson, *Woman's Voice* by Maybanke Anderson and Vida Goldstein's *Woman's Sphere*. Tasmania had no local woman's press. The closest was the *People's Friend*, a temperance newspaper which often discussed women's issues in relation to the temperance question. Tasmanian women did have access to women's journals through their various organisations. The WCTU suggested its members subscribe to the *White Ribbon Signal* which was the Australian journal of the WCTU. The NCWT similarly urged its members to subscribe to the *ICW Bulletin*.<sup>11</sup> But these were specific to the agendas of their organisations and did not contain feminist ideology. Feminist thought and activities varied in the different colonies and Spearritt claims that very few feminists were known in more than one colony. She notes that Louisa Lawson only left New South Wales once.<sup>12</sup> Emily Dobson was well known in Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and

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<sup>8</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', p. 326

<sup>9</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', p. 326

<sup>10</sup> R. Jordan, 'White-Ribboners: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Tasmania, 1885-1914.' Unpublished BA Hons Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2001, *passim*

<sup>11</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT) Non-State (NS) 337/88, White Ribbon Signal, 1 February 1906

<sup>12</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', p. 332

in women's circles in most of the Australian states. She helped form National Councils in three colonies (Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia) yet unlike Louisa Lawson who can be called a public sphere feminist, Emily Dobson was an expediency feminist.

Most Australian women who were active in the women's movement, regardless of their brand of feminism, shared a central concern in womanhood suffrage. This was justified in Tasmania and other mainland states by the expediency feminist belief that women needed to vote to be able to protect women and children from 'exploitation by a patriarchal system'.<sup>13</sup> Women denied that their role in the private sphere disqualified them from influencing laws in the public sphere. Allen claims that Australian women's impact on politics was special: 'instead of seeking to politicise domestic life, Australian adherents of expediency feminism sought to domesticate political life.'<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the expediency feminists in Australia won the right to vote in the early 1900s while the public sphere feminists or suffragettes in Britain did not win the vote until 1918.

Some contemporary authors challenge the dating of first wave feminism;<sup>15</sup> 1880 till 1914 is a general date used because the First World War prompted a decline in feminism as a national movement until the 1960s and 1970s when the second wave feminists continued the fight. This thesis contends that the women's movement of the 1890s and early 1900s, called first wave feminism, did not end until much later. Tasmanian women continued into the 1930s as they had done before. During these years, new concessions were asked for and granted and it was not until the Second World War that there was a lull in feminist activities.

During this period there were many issues confronting women. As examined above some women were concerned to secure the suffrage. This was a preoccupation of the beginning years of first wave feminism. The federal franchise was granted to all white

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<sup>13</sup> Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement', p. 14

<sup>14</sup> Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement', p. 14

<sup>15</sup> M. Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, 1999) p. 9 and J. Clarke and K. White, *Women in Australian Politics* (Sydney, 1983) p. 10

Australian women in 1902 and the states were granted the franchise in South Australia in 1894, Western Australia in 1899, New South Wales in 1902, Tasmania in 1903, Queensland in 1905 and Victoria in 1908.<sup>16</sup> The proper usage of the vote then became a concern and this prompted women's political organisations to be established. Some women were troubled that they had no direct representation in parliament, local councils or on boards and that women had no civic rights. Women were not permitted to be justices of the peace, magistrates or to sit as jurors. Similarly, it was confronting to women that they did not have equal rights to child custody or divorce and that upon marriage they often lost their employment and had to take on their husband's nationality. Between 1899 and 1939, women were concerned for public health and the care and welfare of children. They were worried about moral decency which included concerns about film and literature censorship. Many women were anxious about temperance issues and the inherent dangers of a male bread-winner spending family money on alcohol. They were also anxious about the falling birth rate in Australia and the high infant and maternal mortality rates.

During these years women were interested in the education of both boys and girls and the higher education of girls. Many women and particularly Emily Dobson, were troubled with the domestic servant question. It became harder to find a girl trained in domestic work and the middle classes spent much time discussing possible solutions to this problem. Schools of domestic cookery were established and domestic science was added to the Tasmanian educational curriculum. Employment opportunities changed as new careers opened up for women. This era saw the first Australian women doctors and lawyers. The woman of the 'Victorian era' lost status; once revered, she was now seen as a 'wowser' as the 'new woman' entered society in the 1920s. Women's clothing became less restrictive and hair was cut short. The flapper was seen in society but not necessarily accepted. The new woman, however, was single and independent and able to provide for herself while still maintaining her femininity, unlike the flapper who was a tomboy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns', p. 330

<sup>17</sup> S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London, 1977) p. 124

The First World War was a huge issue confronting women. The war drew women as well as men into the excitement and fear associated with a conflict of its magnitude. Women worked in war aid activities but also, to a limited extent, in new jobs vacated by enlisting men. Out of the war came the great Depression of 1929 till 1935. During these years some women faced having their partners out of work and having children they could not feed and clothe. Single Tasmanian women were denied government assistance until 1935 and once granted this was a meagre amount. New issues for women emerged out of the Depression, primarily calls for effective birth control, and failing this the Depression years saw a rise in the numbers of 'backyard' abortions. A concern also of this later period was in the mortality of infants and mothers.<sup>18</sup> These concerns were all examined by the National Council of Tasmania to greater or lesser extents and will be discussed in this thesis.

The following discussion of the historiography of Australian women will examine how this thesis' approach to writing on the National Council is different from others. Many of the histories written about National Councils are not academic, and are written as hagiographies to espouse the good and cover up the bad. This thesis has not done this. When little or no achievement was made by the NCWT this has been stated. This thesis has used numerous sources on Australian women to show the importance of the NCWT in a national perspective.

## **Historiography**

Interest in the history of Australian women is a growing field. The earliest contributions to Australian feminist history were made in the 1970s by women such as Anne Summers and Miriam Dixson who were first to analyse anachronistic ideologies and suggest new models for the study and inclusion of women's history in a mainstream capacity.<sup>19</sup> In 1985 Patricia Grimshaw remarked of Australian historiography that, 'it would be difficult to point to a national historical tradition that more clearly represented a celebration of ...

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<sup>18</sup> P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath and M. Quartly, *Creating a Nation 1788-1990* (Victoria, 1990) p. 245

<sup>19</sup> A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood, 1994), M. Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present* (Ringwood, 1976) and Allen, 'The "Feminisms" of the Early Women's Movement'

male achievement.'<sup>20</sup> Since the 1970s and 1980s however there has been a growth in the writing of women-centred history and this new wave of literature has proved immensely beneficial to understanding Australian women's place in history.

This thesis has drawn from a number of these women-centred histories and has benefited particularly from several. Chapters by Katie Spearritt and Joy Damousi in Saunders and Evans' *Gender Relations in Australia* (1992) have proved invaluable for discussion on first wave feminism and beyond.<sup>21</sup> 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism 1880-1914' by Spearritt provides a thorough analysis of the type of woman to become involved in this first wave of feminism and discusses which external and internal changes took place for women. Spearritt examines the growth of women's clubs and organisations in Australia and notes the importance of women such as Louisa Lawson, Maybanke Anderson, Rose Scott and Vida Goldstein.

Damousi follows Spearritt's chapter with 'Marching to Different Drums: Women's Mobilisations 1914-1939'. Damousi again provides an informative discussion of the women's movement during the First World War and during the inter-war years. She shows that there was a broadening of discussion in areas previously taboo such as birth control and sexuality. She notes that it was not until the Depression that a discourse was created which undermined progress in women's independence as their traditional role as wives and mothers was reinforced by society.<sup>22</sup>

In Tasmania this backlash did not occur. Tasmanian women activists stated that their primary role was as wives and mothers and this was their sole reason for wanting entry into the public sphere. In the inter-war years the Tasmanian Council for Mother and Child was formed, one example of interest in women's issues increasing rather than declining. Jocelyn Clarke and Kate White state that, while in America and Britain

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<sup>20</sup> P. Grimshaw, 'Women in History: Reconstructing the Past' in J. Goodnow and C. Pateman (eds.) *Women, Social Science and Public Policy* (Sydney, 1985) p. 40

<sup>21</sup> K. Saunders and R. Evans, *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville, 1992)

<sup>22</sup> J. Damousi, 'Marching to Different Drums: Women's Mobilisation, 1914-1939' in K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds.), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville, 1992) p. 372

women's political activity declined once the vote was won, in Australia, women were active for several decades afterwards. Clarke and White suggest that since American and British women had to campaign so determinedly for the vote they were worn out while Australian women received the vote comparatively more easily and then turned to other social and political reforms.<sup>23</sup>

Marilyn Lake in *Getting Equal* (1999) takes this a step further. She states that Australian feminism flourished in the inter-war years.<sup>24</sup> During these years, older organisations such as the National Council were joined by new feminist groups such as the Women's Non-Party League in Tasmania. The inter-war years were a time of renewed women's mobilisation.<sup>25</sup> *Getting Equal* is the most detailed account of the Australian woman's movement and gives the most valuable discussion on the alleged end to the first wave of feminism. Marilyn Lake is regarded as the leading author of women's history in Australia and her work is invaluable in building a picture of feminist activity. Lake provides comparisons with other women's organisations and challenges common misconceptions about the Australian women's movement such as the end of first wave feminism or that Australian women were apathetic to the suffrage and did not become political.<sup>26</sup> She discusses the contribution of Edith Waterworth which is useful in locating Tasmanian women on the Australian feminist stage.<sup>27</sup> Unlike Allen, Lake does not divide feminism into categories but rather uses the term 'feminism' as meaning the public activities of women.<sup>28</sup> This has been criticised by Eva Cox who noted that there is debate as to if a 'singular feminism ever was an appropriate term'.<sup>29</sup> To avoid this problem, this thesis has used 'expediency feminism' in discussions of the women's movement in Tasmania to explain the public work of the National Council women. Although this term was not accepted in the early 1900s, it is now a practical descriptor of these women's position and ideology.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Clarke and White, *Women in Australian Politics*, p. 10

<sup>24</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 9

<sup>25</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 10

<sup>26</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 11

<sup>27</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 140

<sup>28</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, *passim*

<sup>29</sup> E. Cox, 'Book Review', *Labour History*, no 84, May 2003, p. 145

<sup>30</sup> *Mercury* 14 December 1933, p. 12



Miriam Dixon's *The Real Matilda* (1976) provides a constructive discussion on the beginnings of the NCW in Australia and gives a detailed analysis of first wave feminism. She discusses the struggle for the womanhood suffrage and the opinion held by some historians that Australian men did more to win the women's vote than women did. Dixon describes the New South Wales National Council as archetypal of all state Councils. She concludes that the National Councils were 'narrowly issue-orientated', skirting around important equal rights issues such as equal pay and focusing on mundane areas such as domestic service or 'home literature'.<sup>31</sup> This accurately describes the work of the Tasmanian National Council which focused its attention on issues such as domestic servants or women in agriculture during the First World War and seemingly ignored areas of immediate concern. The Tasmanian Council produced few tangible results during the entire forty year period covered by this thesis.

In contrast to this, Anthea Hyslop in *Worth Her Salt* (1982) gives a thorough account of the NCW of Victoria and its activities.<sup>32</sup> The Victorian Council probably achieved the most of all the state Councils. But as Hyslop presents the achievements of both the NCWV and its affiliates indiscriminately there is the appearance of more tangible work than was perhaps achieved. Dixon focuses on the achievements of the New South Wales Council and does not take into account the work done by affiliated organisations. This thesis presents both the work of the Council and that undertaken by its affiliated organisations but is careful to present these achievements separately to show the disparity between what the National Council achieved and what was achieved by other organisations which were, for all intents and purposes, working separately from the Council. Hyslop presents Victorian Council victories as well as looking at Australia and the worldview at that time. She shows the ideologies behind the feminists' struggle of the 1880s in light of the changing world these women lived in and therefore provides a good discussion of feminism. Hyslop asks the question 'whether Australian women would have won the vote as soon as they did had they not stressed the use they would

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<sup>31</sup> Dixon, *The Real Matilda*, p. 203

<sup>32</sup> A. Hyslop, 'Agents and Objects: Women and social reform in Melbourne, 1900-1914' in M. Bevege, *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia* (Sydney, 1982) pp. 230-243

make of it on behalf of social improvement?’<sup>33</sup> This question is examined in this thesis by using the various categories of feminism coined by Judith Allen.

Other general histories of Australian women include Audrey Oldfield’s *Woman Suffrage in Australia* (1992) which provides background and history to the struggle for franchise in Australia and specifically in Tasmania.<sup>34</sup> *Creating a Nation* (1996) by Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, presents the history of Australian women from transportation till the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> It challenges the traditional histories which place man’s influence on shaping Australia as paramount and credits women with agency and responsibility in working as nation builders. It provides stimulating discussion of women’s role in building Australia and their battles for an equal position in the nation they helped to build.

Most recent are Alison Alexander’s book *Wealth of Women* (2001) and Susan Magarey’s *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (2001).<sup>36</sup> *Wealth of Women* provides an overview of the history of women in Australia and Magarey is helpful on the evolution of the women’s movement in Australia. She highlights the similarities between the women of both the first and second waves of feminism and provides important discussions on women’s desire for citizenship, sexual roles and the work and exploitation of women during the years of first wave feminism. She discusses the ‘suffrage-era feminists’ who aged and died towards the end of this period and shows that although not all their aims were met, they cleared a path for women to follow.<sup>37</sup>

The history of the Tasmanian women’s movement is different from that of mainland Australia and has its own unique historiography. Due to limited population and relative isolation, the Tasmanian women’s movement was conservative, limited and appears to have been a few steps behind that of the mainland. There was little diversity in the kinds

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<sup>33</sup> Hyslop, ‘Agents and Objects’, p. 242

<sup>34</sup> A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia* (Cambridge, 1992)

<sup>35</sup> M. Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, 1999) and Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*

<sup>36</sup> A. Alexander, *Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001) and S. Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney, 2001)

<sup>37</sup> Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, p. 192

of women drawn into the public sphere and few outlets for a serious feminist challenge to the establishment. Unfortunately the historiography on Tasmanian women is also limited. Few published histories analyse the contribution of Tasmanian women during the period of first wave feminism, but even fewer deal with the period of the 1920s and 1930s. The extent of historiography on women in Tasmania is confined to general books which include sections on women and children. These tend to discuss the experiences of the lower classes, for example *Down Wapping* (1988) which explores women living in the slum area of Hobart from 1804 till 1940 or Joan Brown's *Poverty is not a Crime* (1972), which looks at the development of the social services in Tasmania during 1803 to 1900.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Stefan Petrow's *Sanatorium of the South?* (1995) examines women in relation to the battle for sanitary reform in Tasmania, and although he looks at the middle-class women who took on this issue, his work is limited to the period from the late 1880s to the early 1900s and is primarily confined to health related concerns.<sup>39</sup> A. R. Taylor's 1973 BA Honours thesis is a rather simplistic account of Emily Dobson's life; although discussions of her activities prior to the National Council were useful.<sup>40</sup> Taylor neglected to contact any of the Dobson family and therefore missed information that could have been utilised as in 1973 more relatives were alive. Only one grandchild is still living and her accounts of her grandmother were interesting.

The most significant work on Tasmanian women during the period of first wave feminism is Alison Alexander's PhD thesis 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania, 1803-1914.'<sup>41</sup> Alexander examines the role of Tasmanian women outside the domestic sphere extensively from 1803 until 1914. She notes that prior to 1880 women in Tasmania contributed little to public life but from 1885 this changed dramatically. Alexander looks at every facet of women's activities outside the home. Her thesis explores the occupations as well as the voluntary activities of women which provide a solid foundation for a study

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<sup>38</sup> M. Sprod (ed.), *Down Wapping* (Hobart, 1988) and J. Brown, *Poverty is not a Crime: The Development of Social Services in Tasmania, 1803-1900* (Hobart, 1972)

<sup>39</sup> S. Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South? Public Health and Politics in Hobart and Launceston, 1875-1914* (Hobart, 1995)

<sup>40</sup> A.R. Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson: Victorian "do-gooder" or Sincere Social Reformer', Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania, 1973.

<sup>41</sup> A. Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania, 1803-1914' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1989

of women in Tasmanian history. She discusses a large proportion of the organisations in Tasmania during the period that involved women and examines key events in the women's movement. Her discussion of the National Council, although brief, helps to build a picture of the Tasmanian National Council.

The NCWT is mentioned by a few Tasmanian historians which include Stefan Petrow's articles, 'Leading Ladies: Women and Film Censorship in Early Twentieth Century Tasmania' and 'Boiling Over: Edith Waterworth and the Criminal Law reform in Tasmania 1917-1924'.<sup>42</sup> Vicki Pearce's article 'A Few Viragos on a Stump: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tasmania' examines the National Council's involvement in the Tasmanian suffrage campaign.<sup>43</sup> Her article discusses the influence of the WCTU in the battle for the suffrage. Pearce gives credit to Tasmanian women for agitating for the vote until it was granted. Many contemporaries and historians of the suffrage movement in Tasmania attribute the victory to inevitability after the federal franchise was granted in 1902. She claims that the WCTU fought alone until 1899 when the National Council was formed in Tasmania which then helped the champion the cause.<sup>44</sup> However this was probably not the case. Pearce bases this claim on a reference in a WCTU annual meeting programme which noted that the National Council were forwarding a report to a suffrage meeting in America. This was the only example of the National Council mentioning the suffrage prior to it being granted in 1903 and is not sufficient evidence to suggest the National Council supported the WCTU in its campaign. The National Council of Women was not primarily interested in the vote.

Histories written about other National Councils of Australia have proved an important asset in determining the differences between the Tasmanian and Australian women's movements. In the 1970s histories of the New South Wales and Victorian Councils were written by contemporary members and provide a biased picture of the Councils and their

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<sup>42</sup> S. Petrow 'Leading Ladies: Women and Film Censorship in Early Twentieth Century Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* 41, 1994, pp. 74-83 and 'Boiling Over: Edith Waterworth and Criminal Law Reform in Tasmania, 1917-1924', *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 4.2, 1994, pp. 9-19

<sup>43</sup> V. Pearce, 'A Few Viragos on a Stump: The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania 1880-1929', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* 32, 1985, pp. 151-164

<sup>44</sup> Pearce, 'A Few Viragos on a Stump', p. 152

activities and achievements. The New South Wales Council's history *Seventy-Five Years* presents the work of that Council and, as with the Tasmanian Council, shows little evidence of work being achieved.<sup>45</sup> Histories of the Victorian Council of women and the Victorian women's movement are more numerous. Two were written by Victorian Council members, a published work by Ada Norris, *Champions of the Impossible* and a pamphlet by Helen Gillan, *A Brief History of the National Council of Women of Victoria*.<sup>46</sup> Both focus on the attempted work of the Victorian Council and both mention the help of the Tasmanian Council and Emily Dobson in establishing the Council in Victoria. The Victorian Council appears to have had more tangible success than either the Tasmanian or New South Wales Councils, especially in regard to influencing child related laws, including age of consent and incest laws. Overall Gillan tends to present an overly optimistic picture of what the NCWV achieved and includes mere discussions as achievements. Although the NCWV had more success than the Tasmanian or New South Wales Council, this still appears to have been limited.

An academic study of the Victorian National Council is seen in a 1988 MA thesis by Kate Gray, 'The Acceptable Face of Feminism', covering the period 1902 till 1918. Gray discusses the NCWV and concludes that they were a moderate organisation, unadventurous in terms of their agenda and holding a political position that did not challenge traditional notions of femininity. It was within this limited framework that the Victorian Council established a means by which women could have a role in state concerns and bureaucracy.<sup>47</sup> She concludes that the Victorian Council was integral to any consideration of women and politics in Australia. This is an important categorisation as this conclusion is not very different from that made by this thesis. The Tasmanian Council may not have been integral to women and politics in an Australian-wide sense but it was certainly integral to the position of women and gains politically in Tasmania. Similarly to the Victorian Council, the NCWT was always moderate, unadventurous and

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<sup>45</sup>The National Council of Women of New South Wales, *Seventy-Five Years, 1861-1971* (Sydney, 1971)

<sup>46</sup>A. Norris, *Champions of the Impossible: A History of the National Council of Women of Victoria, 1902-1977* (Melbourne, 1978) and H. Gillan, *A Brief History of the National Council of Women of Victoria 1902-1945* (Melbourne, 1945)

<sup>47</sup>K. Gray, 'The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The National Council of Women of Victoria, 1902-1918', Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1972, p. 144

worked in areas that did not challenge traditional femininity. It worked with established bureaucracy and because of this was often caught in 'red tape' and was not able to progress. The National Councils of Australia did attempt to impact on a national level and this will be seen in the campaigns for an educational bureau, censorship, uniformed marriage and divorce laws, and in efforts to influence nationality laws.

*The National Council of Women of New Zealand* (1996) by Dorothy Page is the most recently published work on any National Council and is the most comprehensive history of a National Council of Women in Australasia.<sup>48</sup> Histories of National Councils tend to be short, partisan chronologies written by members as discussed above, but Page presents her work in both thematic and chronological form, which allows the reader to see the achievements made in each period. Unfortunately, the NCW NZ suffered a decline and disbanded over a large period in which the NCWT was active, so comparisons are incomplete. The New Zealand Council was active in many of the same areas as the Australian Councils but was perhaps more militant and radical than its Australian counterparts. This could explain why interest waned and it went into recess for a number of years.

The National Council of Tasmania expressed interest in a wide variety of areas during its forty years of work from 1899 until 1939, ranging from tuberculosis to peace and arbitration, from the white-slave traffic to appropriate bathing attire. It has therefore been necessary to draw on a large number of histories dealing with specific areas. The works of Lloyd Robson have proved very helpful for discussions of Tasmanian history, in particular his work on the First World War and the 1929 Depression.<sup>49</sup> Robson's document-based histories provide a level of analysis which is interesting in discussion of the conscription campaigns in Australia. Robson says that 'war brought to the surface of Australian life the intense malevolence which typified the conscription campaigns'.<sup>50</sup> Marilyn Lake agrees with this assertion in her discussions of the White Feather League

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<sup>48</sup> D. Page, *The National Council of Women: A Centennial History* (Auckland, 1996)

<sup>49</sup> Works such as L. Robson, *Australia and the Great War 1914-1918* (Sydney, 1970) and L. Robson, *The Tasmanian Story* (Melbourne, 1987)

<sup>50</sup> Robson, *Australia and the Great War*, p. 24

established in Hobart and her analysis of the Tasmanian experience of the war in both her MA thesis 'Tasmania and the First World War' (1972) and her book, *A Divided Society: Tasmania during World War I* (1975).<sup>51</sup> Judith Allen's discussions of the impact on women after the war were important in presenting a picture of the issues confronting women once the primary war aid work was finished. In *Sex and Secrets* (1990)<sup>52</sup> Allen presents an insightful discussion on the issues effecting men during the inter-war years and the 'crisis in Australian masculinity' which arose during men's integration back into society after the war, coupled with the change in women's position as the 'new woman' became more prevalent. Although this was not overtly apparent in a study of the Tasmanian National Council, Allen's works shows the bigger picture of issues confronting Australian women during the inter-war years.<sup>53</sup>

Biographical histories were used to a limited extent in this thesis, as the women involved in the Tasmanian National Council were not significant enough on the Australian stage to warrant inclusion into such works. Women such as Emily Dobson, Jessie Rooke, Edith Waterworth and Alicia O'Shea-Petersen have however been mentioned in Heather Radi's *200 Australian Women* (1988) which was also a valuable source for the inclusion of biographical details of inter-state women.<sup>54</sup> Other biographies of inter-state women used included Janette Bomford's work on Vida Goldstein, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman* (1993), the biography of Edith Cowan, *A Unique Position* (1978) written by Peter Cowan and the biography of Rose Scott written by Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (1994).<sup>55</sup> These works provide glowing representations of their subjects which many authors find difficult to avoid when writing biography. People are generally eulogised by their biographers and this can present a danger when taken at face value. The biographies of Catherine Helen Spence and Maybanke Anderson were also utilised to provide comparisons with other feminists, although biographical details of

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<sup>51</sup> M. Lake, *A Divided Society: Tasmania during World War I* (Melbourne, 1975) and M. Lake, 'Tasmania and the First World War', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1972

<sup>52</sup> J. Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Women since 1880* (Melbourne, 1990)

<sup>53</sup> Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, p. 132

<sup>54</sup> H. Radi (ed.), *200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology* (Marrickville, 1988)

<sup>55</sup> J. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Melbourne, 1993); P. Cowan, *A Unique Position: A Biography of Edith Dircksey Cowan* (West Perth, 1978) and J. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne, 1994)

these women do not feature in this thesis.<sup>56</sup> Presenting an unbiased picture was particularly difficult in the study of Emily Dobson. She was usually commented on fondly by her friends, harshly by her opponents and gives the impression that all were terrified of acting against her wishes. This may or may not have been the case but does make the study of her life difficult. While there is little solid evidence of her domination, she created the distinct impression that she was very much in control.

This thesis has drawn extensively on the newspapers of the period as well as existing manuscripts of the Council and affiliated organisations. The Hobart National Council records held at the Archives Office of Tasmania cover the periods from 1905-1910 and 1920-1932. The Council minutes from 1899-1905, 1910-1920 and 1933-1940 have been lost by various secretaries and have never been archived or viewed by contemporary historians. There are no minutes books solely relating to the Launceston Council during this period. It was necessary to use the Tasmanian newspapers to fill in the gaps in the minute books. Thirteen newspapers were read extensively for the period 1899-1939 but it was primarily the widely circulated *Mercury* and *Tasmanian Mail* in Hobart and *Examiner* in Launceston which held frequent mentions of the Council's activities. Mentions of the National Council were frequent until the mid-1920s when it began to receive less space in the papers. There was a trend in the newspapers to report less on the meetings of organisations which made the study of the later years difficult as no NCWT records existed and newspaper reports were sporadic. The National Council was championed by the press in its early years. The *Tasmanian Mail's* women's columnists Alix and then Aquila wrote regularly on the Council, reporting on its meetings and discussing its intentions and promised benefit. Aquila commented of the Council in 1899, 'twenty-five societies are represented in the council, all of them working to lessen the evil, and make greater the good in the world. May the good at last vanquish all evil and touch perfection.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> S. Magarey, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence* (Marrickville, 1985) and J. Roberts, *Maybank Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Marrickville, 1993)

<sup>57</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 21 October 1899, p. 8



At the other extreme was the labor newspaper, the *Clipper*, which ran until 1909. The *Clipper* presented the opposite view to *Aquila*. It saw the National Council members as examples of privileged middle-class women, unburdened by employment or poverty and did not see any virtue in the Council or its work:

This week the Hobart ... NCW have been discussing the stage. The *Clipper* does not know that it ever heard more ignorant and harmful twaddle talked, even in parliament ... on the whole, if the NCW is going to lend itself to this sort of vapid and malicious foolishness, the sooner it shuts up and leaves mere men to fight its battles cleanly, the better.<sup>58</sup>

In between these two extremes lay the other papers of Hobart and Launceston. Some cited references to the meetings and conventions while some, like the *Voice* which replaced the *Clipper* in 1909, ignored the Council entirely. The newspapers published the proceedings of National Council meetings and congresses. In some cases as mentioned above there were editorials and columnist's comments on the Council but generally the papers simply published the meetings' minutes. This was a vital resource.

This thesis contributes to the knowledge about the women's movement in Tasmania and adds to the understanding about the evolution of Tasmanian feminism. Like Lake, it challenges the commonly held belief that first wave feminism only existed in Australia between 1880 and 1914. It helps to build a picture of the pioneer women of feminism in Tasmania through the National Council, which was the 'acceptable face of feminism' and seldom seen as radical. It is different from other theses on the women's movement in either Tasmania or Victoria as it covers the period of the inter-war years. The most thorough thesis on the Tasmanian women's movement, Alexander's PhD thesis, only covers the period up to 1914 and therefore had no reason to challenge the belief that first wave feminism ended at this time. It is because this thesis covers a wider period that it has become apparent that there was no obvious end to the women's movement in Tasmania until much later. It will be shown that the impact of the Depression along with

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<sup>58</sup> *Clipper* 10 August 1902, p. 7

the deaths of many of the key National Council women ended first wave feminism in Tasmania.

Part one covers the period of the Council's inception until the eve of the First World War. It explores the initial problems in forming and maintaining the Council and examines the early attempts at work in the community. The Council was heavily influenced by Emily Dobson, seen in the campaign to establish domestic training for girls. This desire for a well-trained domestic servant diminished during the war years but again surfaced in the inter-war years. The Council produced its most tangible achievements, and these were few.

Part two discusses the period of the First World War until 1920. During these years the Council showed its pro-conscription tendencies while working in areas less practical than would be imagined. While the Red Cross organised aid for the troops the National Council worked to train women as farmers, to secure tougher temperance legislation, to establish policewomen in Tasmania and to have efficient film censorship implemented. It also looks at the beginning of Edith Waterworth's move into the public sphere.

Part three explores the inter-war years and concludes in 1939 at the eve of the Second World War. This period was marked as a time of little achievement by the Council although Tasmanian women made substantial gains. Women were appointed as justices of the peace, as special magistrates to the children's court and were granted the right to stand for parliament. Emily Dobson's influence over the Council ended in 1934 when she died, aged 91. As she entered the inter-war years however she was an elderly but feisty woman.

Part four stands alone from the rest of this thesis as it examines the lives of many of the key women of the National Council. It shows the types of woman who joined the Council and some generalisations are made about what attracted certain women. This section also looks briefly at the work of some of the organisations that affiliated with the

National Council and examines why they were able to achieve things the NCWT could not and why they affiliated with the Council.

This thesis attempts to explain why the activity of the National Council of Women over forty years was not substantial. But although little tangible evidence of success will be shown it is concluded that this was not the purpose of the Council. The NCWT acted as a facilitator of dialogue between existing women's organisations and was an agent for debate and discussion in the Tasmanian community. These first forty years were primarily dominated by Emily Dobson who imposed her will on the Council on many occasions, but that this was not necessarily counterproductive. Emily Dobson provided the Council with stability and continuity as well as patronage and financial support. It will be suggested that without the interference of Emily Dobson, the Council may not have been as prominent as it was. This thesis shows the importance of the National Council to the women's movement in Tasmania. It is demonstrated that the women's movement in Tasmania flourished with the efforts of these National Council women and that the end of first wave feminism came with the Depression but also with the old age and deaths of many of these pioneer women.

# PART I

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF TASMANIA

1899 – 1914

## CHAPTER ONE – NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF TASMANIA AND EMILY DOBSON

The woman's movement bloomed around the western world from the mid-1880s. Particularly in Britain and America, women from all lifestyles, but mostly educated women from the middle to upper classes, with few or no family commitments, began to discuss their role in society. They questioned the lack of rights for women and the welfare of children; they looked at the home and the family unit and decided that it was up to them to keep the family together and to enhance its importance. They wanted women to have access to higher education and to professional careers, on equal terms with men.<sup>1</sup> Women began to form temperance societies, aimed at the reformation of the drunkard husband, who was taking food off the table and shoes off the feet of children through his drinking. Frances Willard created the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1873 and missionaries spread the message to the world. The WCTU was the first worldwide network of women and the first national women's organisation in Australia. Suffrage organisations began to spring up around the world, the Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL) being particularly active in New South Wales and Victoria. In New Zealand, more so than Australia, political associations were born out of the WCTU and after the female franchise was won, these groups developed platforms on women's issues.<sup>2</sup> It is in this new era of publicly active women that the National Council was created.

The National Council of Women (NCW) was founded in 1884 by the American pacifist May Wright Sewall. It aimed to bring together representatives from existing women's organisations and co-ordinated their activities. Individual National Councils were participants in the International Council of Women (ICW), a federation of non-government women's organisations from many nations, races and cultures. The ICW first convened in America in 1888<sup>3</sup> at a meeting of the American Women's Suffrage Association. A constitution was drawn and it was resolved to meet every five years with the hope of creating a worldwide parliament of women to intervene in the widest range of

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<sup>1</sup> D. Page, *The National Council of Women: A Centennial History* (Auckland, 1996) p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Page, *The National Council of Women*, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> The date of the International Council of Women's (ICW) establishment differ. J. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne, 1994) p. 148 and National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA) *Quarterly Bulletin* Vol. 13 No. 6, March 1996

issues affecting women and children.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the ICW chose to address legal and citizen rights, peace and international arbitration, social and economic conditions and the international traffic in women and girls.<sup>5</sup> It worked for the promotion of international understanding and goodwill.<sup>6</sup> The first president of the ICW was the Countess of Aberdeen. The work of both the ICW and NCW was based on the 'Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'<sup>7</sup> They worked for the removal of all discrimination against women in law and in practice and acted as co-ordinators between different women's organisations.<sup>8</sup> The NCW was an expediency feminist organisation and therefore was not interested in taking women out of the home; it believed the traditional role of women was as homemakers. In this respect it was essentially conservative in its outlook; at the first congress of the NCWT the President reiterated their position; 'we hold fast to the belief that woman's first duty must be her home, and that by it she will ever be judged, and that by its home life every country will stand or fall.'<sup>9</sup>

The National Council of Women of Tasmania was formed in 1899 to represent Tasmania at the Quinquennial Congress of the ICW to be held in London. Tasmania was invited to send delegates by the ICW president, Lady Isobel Aberdeen, who had written to every colony in the British Empire encouraging Councils to be formed. The first meetings of the Tasmanian National Council were held in May 1899 and women delegates from Tasmanian societies interested in charity, philanthropy or working for the betterment of the community were summoned. A meeting in Launceston was held on 11 May 1899 at the Town Hall in response to a letter from Lady Dodds, wife of the Administrator of Tasmania, urging 'the formation of a NCW for the promotion of greater unity and mutual understanding between associations of women working for the common welfare of the community.'<sup>10</sup> The Launceston branch was formed in connection with one in Hobart. Lady Braddon, (wife of Sir Edward Braddon, Tasmanian Premier 1894-1899)<sup>11</sup> was to be the Launceston representative at Hobart.

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<sup>4</sup> Page, *The National Council of Women*, p. 10

<sup>5</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p. 148

<sup>6</sup> NCWA *Quarterly Bulletin* Vol. 13 No. 6, March 1996

<sup>7</sup> National Council of Women of Tasmania (NCWT) Newsletter 1969, Tasmaniana Library

<sup>8</sup> NCWA *Quarterly Bulletin* Vol 13 No. 6, March 1996

<sup>9</sup> *Examiner* 26 April 1901, p. 6

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 12 May 1899, [p. 2]

<sup>11</sup> S. Bennett, 'Sir Edward Nicholas Coventry Braddon (1829-1904)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7, p. 378



**Executive Committee of the National Council of Women of Tasmania**

Front: Mary Bisdee, Mrs Styant-Browne

Middle: Mrs Young, Mrs Kerr (vice-president), Emily Dobson (president), Mrs Bennison (vice-president) Sarah Hannaford (vice-president)

Back: Mrs Walker, Ellen Lodge, Frances Edwards, Mrs Davies, Mrs Robinson

*Tasmanian Mail* 24 February 1906, p. 19

A similar meeting held in Hobart formed the National Council of Women of Tasmania (NCWT). The original Council comprised ten northern and twenty-two southern organisations: the Queen's Jubilee Fund, Society for the Protection from Cruelty to Animals, Dorcas Society, Girls' Industrial School, Magdalen Home, Ladies' Christian Association, Ragged Schools, Ministering Children's League, Women's Sanitary Association, WCTU, Young Women's Christian Association, Anchorage Refuge Home, Nursing Association, Night School, Anchor Club, Convalescent Home, Blind Society, Art Society, Literary Association, Itinerants, Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Chalmers Literary Association.<sup>12</sup> Viscountess Gormanston, wife of the Governor of Tasmania, was elected President and was, along with Lady Teresa Hamilton (wife of a former Tasmanian Governor) and Emily Dobson, elected a delegate to the ICW. These initial meetings were met with support from the local newspapers, the *Tasmanian Mail* writing:

The joining of the NCW, however, offers such advantages and implies so few responsibilities that it is scarcely likely any withdrawals will take place. Launceston women seem to have taken up the idea warmly, and enthusiastically offered to agree with any resolutions passed at the Hobart meeting ... when the novelty of the idea has worn off, and all are enabled to appreciate its excellence and use there will be much more of a rush for than doubt and hesitation about membership.<sup>13</sup>

It is unclear what was meant by 'implies so few responsibilities'. It is possible that even from its inception the delegates knew that little work would be required of them; although this seems unlikely and was probably a flippant remark made by the *Tasmanian Mail*. With the Council formed, the three women left for London and the congress. In their absence the NCWT lay dormant until towards the end of the year, although reports were received during 1899. Teresa Hamilton was reported to have distinguished herself; her photo and brief biography were included in a who's who book of the congress.<sup>14</sup> When Emily Dobson returned from the congress, she was interviewed by Aquila of the *Tasmanian Mail* on her experiences. When asked if she thought the congress was useful for women, she replied, 'Undoubtedly I do, such a meeting, composed of earnest,

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<sup>12</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 20 May 1899, p. 4

<sup>13</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 20 May 1899, p. 4

<sup>14</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 12 August 1899, p. 8



thoughtful women, gathered together for the single purpose of comparing views upon, and discussing, the most prominent world questions affecting their sex must result in good.'<sup>15</sup>

It was in this spirit of optimism that the National Council of Tasmania began to look forward to the work it would attempt and the difference it hoped to make in uniting the women's organisations of the colony. The constitution of the NCWT provided for one Council and one executive. The Council was made up of officially appointed delegates from different associations working for the betterment of the community. Each association was allowed two delegates to the Council, with other members allowed to be present at general meetings, but not allowed to vote in elections. The executive was made up of fourteen delegates, seven from the north and seven from the south as well as the president, vice-presidents and the office bearers of that year.<sup>16</sup> Associations affiliated with the NCWT by application to the executive and by paying a small annual fee. Delegates were proposed and the Council confirmed them.

NCWT meetings were originally quarterly, but this changed to monthly before the First World War. The executive meeting of the Council was held half an hour prior to the general meeting at which all members could be present.<sup>17</sup> Congresses were held annually and after 1902, interstate Congresses were held bi-annually; these allowed the affiliated organisations a forum to discuss progress. The average National Council general meeting involved a roll call, discussion of correspondence, possibly the passing of a resolution, some general discussion and then the meeting would adjourn. Unlike WCTU meetings, there were no prayers said, no songs sung and no pledges made.<sup>18</sup> Although NCWT members were Christian, it was not a Christian organisation.

The first Australian NCW was formed in New South Wales in 1896 under the guidance of Margaret Windeyer who had been involved in the formation of the first British National Council in 1895.<sup>19</sup> Emily Dobson helped to form the Victorian and South

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<sup>15</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 23 December 1899, p. 8

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 17 November 1905, p. 1

<sup>17</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Non-State (NS) 325/8 A and B, Minute Book of the NCWT, *passim*

<sup>18</sup> AOT, NS 325/8 A and B, *passim*; NS 337/29-30, Minute Book of the WCTU, *passim*

<sup>19</sup> The National Council of Women of New South Wales, *Seventy-Five Years, 1896-1971* (Sydney, 1971) p. 3

Australian branches of the National Council in 1902.<sup>20</sup> The Queensland branch was established in 1905 and the National Council of Women of Western Australia was formed in 1911. The first NCW WA president was Lady Edeline Strickland (wife of a former Governor of Tasmania) who had been involved in the NCWT and had acted as patroness from 1904 till 1909 when she moved to Western Australia and helped form the NCW WA.<sup>21</sup> The NCW of Canberra was not established until 1939. Each of the state Councils reported to the National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA), formed in 1931, although prior to this a federation of the State Councils existed. Each of the Australian State Councils was represented in the NCWA, which in turn was represented at the ICW.

Since 1899 there had been two branches of the Council, one at Hobart and one at Launceston but only one National Council of Tasmania. There are several examples of petty disputes between these northern and southern branches. For example a letter was sent to the southern members without the consent of the northern executive, which culminated in the letter being ignored.<sup>22</sup> The president accused a northern member of keeping NCWT property that was not hers; a member threatened to resign because of an incident relating to the Council's gaol work; and northern secretaries were elected unconstitutionally.<sup>23</sup> It was suggested by Ellen Lodge in 1905 that, 'there had been so much friction that she would like a better feeling to exist between north and south so that [they] could take up the good work of the Council and work amicably together.'<sup>24</sup> Petty disputes plagued the National Council in its first years. It became so concerned with matters of protocol and procedure that it often forgot what it was trying to do.

The Launceston Council, while an active participant in the earlier years, was making less of an impact by 1914. Annual congresses, though once alternating between the two centres, were primarily held in Hobart. In 1929 the Launceston Council disbanded and remained so for the rest of the period covered by this thesis. It was reformed in May 1943 and is still active. Although this thesis examines the NCW of Tasmania, the Launceston Council played a minor role.

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<sup>20</sup> H. Gillan, *A Brief History of the National Council of Women of Victoria 1902-1945* (Melbourne, 1946) p. 9

<sup>21</sup> D. Davidson, *Women on the Warpath: Feminists of the First Wave* (Perth, 1997) p. 42

<sup>22</sup> Davidson, *Women on the Warpath*, p. 42

<sup>23</sup> AOT, NS 325/8A, Minute Book of NCWT, 30 July 1909; 12 August 1905

<sup>24</sup> AOT, NS 325/8A, 19 August 1905

As an 'organisation of organisations' the National Council and its affiliated societies experienced some difficulties in its first few years. There was excitement among the philanthropic community when the NCWT was established and many organisations affiliated. But problems began to appear almost immediately, especially with the largest of the women's organisations in Tasmania, the WCTU. The problems seem to have arisen from misunderstandings between the two organisations as each tried to establish its place in the Tasmanian philanthropic community. An example of these problems occurred in 1905 when the WCTU delegate to the NCWT changed unconstitutionally, and the Council responded by expressing its outrage at the situation.<sup>25</sup> The WCTU was the largest woman's organisation in Tasmania working for the betterment of the status of women before the National Council was formed. Perhaps the WCTU felt the Council was interfering in its sphere of interest. The women involved in the public sphere in Tasmania were not numerous. The same women tended to serve in each organisation, as will be shown in chapter ten. It would have been difficult to go from a leading role one day to taking a back seat the next as the women attended their various meetings. The examples of disputes between the NCWT and the WCTU decreased and after 1905 it was rare for disagreements to be made public. It appears that earlier problems were a result of the NCWT establishing itself in the community and finding its own sphere of influence.

Organisations continued to affiliate and disaffiliate throughout the entire forty year period covered by this thesis. Many remained affiliated when there is no evidence that they benefited from the connection. There was an element of prestige involved in belonging to the National Council. It was patronised by the wife of the Governor and included women from many of Tasmania's elite families. Whether organisations benefited from the dialogue which was established between them is difficult to assess. It is certain that most organisations remained affiliated throughout the period even though little tangible work was done by the Council.

The NCWT was not designed for active work. In Lady Braddon's words, 'We must remember that it [the NCW] exists by the rules of its constitution only to afford a means for women workers to meet and deliberate, not for active initiation of work ... we cannot

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<sup>25</sup> AOT, NS 325/8A, 18 April 1905

from the Council do anything but indicate and suggest.'<sup>26</sup> Instead of uniting the philanthropic organisations of Tasmania, the Council caused some rifts as shown with the WCTU. By upsetting some areas of the community they showed that, firstly they were being listened to and secondly, that they were making an impact. Other women's organisations had happily co-existed in Tasmania for a number of years without prompting the problems the NCW caused between other organisations or between northern and southern Tasmania. This was the National Council's impact in its first years in Tasmania, occasionally praised or criticised and sometimes ignored. In these early days it does seem to have had an impact on women's organisations. Although the Council lost some of its affiliates, the overall number steadily grew; except for a few, every significant woman's organisation in Hobart was, at one time affiliated with the Council (see appendix four for details).

### **Emily Dobson**

The National Council was influenced and led by one woman during most of this forty year period. Emily Dobson was present at its inauguration in 1899 and was made a vice-president. In 1904 she became president and stayed as such until she died in 1934 aged 91 years. Her impact throughout the thirty years of her presidency was significant. There is evidence that many of the National Council's areas of interest, especially in this first period, were dictated by Emily Dobson. The National Council of Tasmania was 'Emily's Empire'. It facilitated prestige for her in the national and international community as a woman's advocate, and in Tasmania it established her as Hobart's 'Grand Old Lady'. At her funeral the minister commented:

The feeling of loss which many experienced at the death of Mrs Dobson must be ameliorated by pride in her almost unparalleled life of achievement, and the high esteem in which she was held by all sections of the community. The spirit of unselfishness, and the desire to serve her fellow-beings, which had been manifested in her many good works should be an inspiration to those who were left behind.<sup>27</sup>

She certainly had a life of achievement but while she was alive comments about her were not always so complimentary. To understand how Emily Dobson became the woman

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<sup>26</sup> *Examiner* 14 March 1903, p. 6

<sup>27</sup> *Mercury* 7 June 1934, p. 6



Emily Dobson (c. 73 years old)

Photograph from Private Collection

described in this obituary and led the National Council for over thirty years it is important to first examine her life before the National Council.

Emily Dobson was the daughter of Thomas James and Charlotte Lempriere nee Smith. Thomas Lempriere arrived as a free settler in Hobart from London aboard the *Regalia* in 1822. He was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1796 and was the son of a British banker.<sup>28</sup> He married Charlotte Smith at St David's Church in 1823.<sup>29</sup> Together they had eleven children; Emily was the youngest, born in 1842. Lempriere was employed in the commissariat department in Hobart, Maria Island and Macquarie Harbour and was appointed Commissariat Clerk at Port Arthur in June 1833. Charlotte Lempriere and her sister in law, Harriet, opened a school for young ladies in 1825. The reason for this may have been that in 1825 Lempriere became insolvent.<sup>30</sup> In 1849 he was recalled to England and was appointed assistant commissary general in Hong Kong. He attempted to return to Tasmania in 1851 but died on board ship in 1852 aged 56 years.<sup>31</sup> Lempriere was a renowned diarist, artist and collector. He was the creator of a museum at Port Arthur and his work 'The Penal Settlement of Van Diemen's Land' was published in the *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science, Agriculture and Statistics*.<sup>32</sup> Details of Charlotte's death are not known, nor is it known if she and the children accompanied Lempriere to Hong Kong. Charlotte Lempriere was active in the society of Port Arthur, as her daughter would become in Hobart. The social life of Port Arthur was centred around the Lemprieres,<sup>33</sup> as they were friends of Commandant Charles O'Hara Booth and his wife Elizabeth.<sup>34</sup>

Emily Dobson was ten years old when her father died and she went to live with her eldest brother, probably Edward Lempriere and his wife.<sup>35</sup> She was not formally educated but was taught at home, presumably by her father and then her brother or perhaps a

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<sup>28</sup> W. F. Ellis, 'Thomas James Lempriere (1796-1852)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 2, p. 105

<sup>29</sup> J.R Morris, 'Early Convict History of Maria Island', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, 1964 Vol. 11 No. 4, p. 166

<sup>30</sup> Morris, 'Early Convict History', p. 166

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, 'Lempriere', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 2, p. 106

<sup>32</sup> M. Glover, 'Some Port Arthur Experiments', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* 1979 Vol. 26 No. 4 p. 133

<sup>33</sup> F.C Green, 'Cornelius Gavin Casey', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* 1961 Vol. 9 No. 1, p. 20

<sup>34</sup> D. Heard (ed.), *The Journal of Charles O'Hara Booth: Commandant of the Port Arthur Penal Settlement* (Hobart, 1981) *passim*

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Gladys Dobson 1 August 2002

governess. Thomas Lempriere noted in his diaries that he schooled his elder children in 'French, History, Geography, Geometry etc.'<sup>36</sup> It is likely that Emily Dobson benefited from this as well. It was traditional for girls to be educated at home and be schooled by their parents.

Nothing more is known of Emily Dobson's life until she married Henry Dobson in 1868 at twenty-six years of age. He was the second son of John Dobson, a lawyer, by his second wife Kate Willis and was born on 24 December 1841. Henry Dobson was educated at the Hutchins School, Hobart. Admitted to the Tasmanian Bar in 1864, he joined his father's law firm, eventually to be Dobson, Mitchell and Allport and was elected to the House of Assembly as the member for Brighton 1891-1899. Henry Dobson was leader of the opposition and was Tasmanian Premier 1892-1894. Interested in education, he proposed an amendment to the Education Act, which made schooling compulsory five days a week and was an active supporter of the kindergarten movement.<sup>37</sup> Henry Dobson was founder and president of the Tasmanian Tourist Association and worked for the establishment of an official tourist bureau in Tasmania, supporting scenery preservation and the fruit growing industry.<sup>38</sup> Their marriage took place on 4 February 1868 at 'Ratho' in Bothwell, which was the family home of Emily Dobson's sister Lucy Reid. Emily Dobson married well and gained a higher social position.

Henry Dobson was wealthy and this ensured a comfortable life. The family lived at Elboden House, a large Hobart home. They employed at least two maids, a cook, gardener, a French governess and a secretary.<sup>39</sup> Emily Dobson was able to travel to Europe thirty-three times and enjoyed sixty-seven trips away from Tasmania.<sup>40</sup> Emily enjoyed the Dobson money, which allowed her to carry out her activities.

Henry and Emily Dobson had six children, four girls and two boys, between 1869 and 1882; the last daughter was born when Emily Dobson was forty. The Dobsons also raised three grandchildren after the early death of their son Ernest in 1911. Three of their

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<sup>36</sup> Glover, 'Some Port Arthur Experiments', p. 132

<sup>37</sup> E. M Dollery, 'Henry Dobson (1841-1918)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 8, p. 312

<sup>38</sup> Dollery, 'Dobson', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 8, p. 312

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Gladys Dobson 1 August 2002

<sup>40</sup> *Examiner* 6 June 1934, p. 7

daughters married into wealthy families. Kate married Harold Minton Taylor and moved to Sydney; Emily married Lord Parry and moved to England; and Clare married Hugh Tyser, owner of a large shipping company and also moved to England. The fourth daughter, Marguerite remained unmarried and stayed as Emily's companion until her death. Louis Dobson was the first-born son; he became a lawyer with Dobson, Mitchell and Allport and built an extensive property across the road from Elboden House. The Dobson children were secured in high society by marriage and financially did well.<sup>41</sup>

Emily Dobson's activities before 1890 remain obscure. She certainly would have been occupied with her young family. Her philanthropic activities appear to have begun in the 1891 when she became interested in the sanitation problems of Hobart and helped to found the Women's Sanitary Association. During the 1890s Henry Dobson began his political career and became premier in 1892. This appears to coincide with Emily Dobson's debut into the public sphere. In the 1890s the Dobson children were older, the eldest in her twenties and the youngest about ten. This would have meant an increase in freedom for Emily Dobson and fewer commitments in the home. Before Emily Dobson became involved in the National Council she worked in soup kitchens, housing schemes and the Southport settlement during the depression of the early 1890s. She worked with the Ministering Children's League and Victoria Convalescent Home; once the National Council was formed, she continued to work with different organisations but often attempted to do this through the auspices of the NCWT.

Emily Dobson was a well-known philanthropist in Tasmania through her determination and her husband's money and connections, and the Dobsons made a formidable team. There are several examples of Henry and Emily supporting each other when one of them had a goal in mind. When Emily attempted to establish domestic training classes in Hobart, Henry offered to fund classes in connection with the Education Department.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when Henry became interested in a Free Kindergarten association, Emily arranged women's meetings and invited the school's first teacher to live at Elboden House.<sup>43</sup> Henry and Emily Dobson appear to have both been genuine philanthropists.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Gladys Dobson 1 August 2002

<sup>42</sup> *Mercury* 14 December 1906, p. 2

<sup>43</sup> *Mercury* 1 October 1910, p. 2



Emily Dobson was involved in a substantial number of the philanthropic organisations in Hobart. The *Clipper* published a comical conversation between two women discussing a new society: 'Aren't you a member?' 'I suppose I am. I belong to most societies. I believe I joined something or other that Mrs Dobson is connected with, but what is it for, for I don't pretend to know.'<sup>44</sup> The *Clipper* often made fun of Emily Dobson. As the wife of a conservative Premier, she was an easy target, but in this case, the *Clipper* was quite right. Emily was the president or founding member of at least nineteen organisations of Hobart including the Women's Sanitary Association, Bush Nursing, Child Welfare Association, Consumptive Sanatorium, Blind, Deaf and Dumb institution, Free Kindergarten Association, Alliance Française, Victoria Convalescent Home, Girl Guide Association, Lyceum Club, Ministering Children's League, League of Nations Union, WCTU, Tasmanian Art Society, Victoria League, and the Village Settlement Committee. Emily Dobson was involved in almost every non-church based organisation in Hobart. This does not mean however that she was not a devout Christian. The Dobson family were Anglican and attended St George's Church, Battery Point but later moved to All Saints' Church in South Hobart.<sup>45</sup>

The Women's Sanitary Association (WSA) was Emily Dobson's first public attempt at philanthropy. It was established in 1891 when she and Teresa Hamilton called a meeting on 9 September, prompted by a typhoid outbreak.<sup>46</sup> Sanitary associations were not new to Hobart but the women's one put emphasis on personal hygiene for health and cleanliness. Members of the association visited houses in allocated streets and discuss health and hygiene with women.<sup>47</sup>

A second area of philanthropic work in which Emily Dobson became involved was a soup kitchen designed to offer some relief to the poor during the depression of the 1890s. It was opened in June 1893 and was operated by Emily Dobson through the WSA with the assistance of the Hobart Benevolent Society. It ran from nine until four daily, with members stewing meat and chopping vegetables for the soups and serving the food. On the opening day of the soup kitchen Emily Dobson was seen, 'in a large white apron and

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<sup>44</sup> *Clipper* 25 March 1905, p. 7

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Gladys Dobson 1 August 2002

<sup>46</sup> S. Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South?* (Hobart, 1995) p. 107

<sup>47</sup> Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South?*, p. 109

sleeves ... taking the tickets as they were presented.'<sup>48</sup> This work was not received favourably by the *Clipper*, which accused the women of pauperising Tasmanians by providing bread when men wanted work: 'the unemployed want work to buy bread. Mrs Dobson offers them sop in a soup kitchen. One step removed from asking for bread and receiving a stone.'<sup>49</sup> Men wanted work but that was not the role of these women. The government was the body responsible for encouraging employment. In the meantime would it have been more productive to allow families to go hungry? The *Clipper* was never charitable in its remarks about Emily Dobson and it appears in this instance it allowed its prejudices to overshadow the fact that these women were feeding up to 1000 people a day. Emily Dobson's soup kitchen was not designed to solve the problems of the state, merely to offer some relief from those problems. The *Clipper* saw the soup kitchen as propping up the failing government system. The kitchen ceased operation in October 1893, as the warmer weather was believed to decrease the need.<sup>50</sup> Emily Dobson's efforts for the soup kitchen were genuine philanthropy. She did work for the poor which she would not have done in her own home.

After the soup kitchen had closed Emily Dobson started looking at the needs of the poor in Hobart and decided that sanitation and cheap housing would help allay some of the problems. Some of the houses of Hobart were of poor quality, repair and sanitation and it was the poorest people who were forced to live in them. A model housing scheme was begun in September 1893 run by Emily Dobson and a ladies committee. They aimed to build respectable houses for Hobart's poor by forming a company and selling shares to businessmen.<sup>51</sup> Houses would be built and rented and this would provide valuable housing as well as employ builders. Emily Dobson proposed that after a certain number of years, tenants who kept their cottages in good order should be given the deeds.<sup>52</sup> This scheme was unsuccessful and folded without building any houses.<sup>53</sup> The reason was that in 1893 Henry and Emily Dobson persuaded the committee that the money raised would be put to more profitable use in the Village Settlement Scheme. Commitment to the

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<sup>48</sup> A.R Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson: Victorian "do-gooder" or Sincere Social Reformer', Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania, 1973. p. 37

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson', p. 37

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson', p. 38

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson', p. 39

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson', p. 40

<sup>53</sup> S. Petrow, 'Hovels in Hobart: The Quality and Supply of Working-Class Housing, 1880-1942', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* Vol. 39 No. 4, 1992, p. 164

model-housing scheme was not strong and the Village Settlement Scheme was more exciting.

Emily Dobson became intensely involved in the Village Settlement or Southport Settlement as it was later known. Ideas of co-operative communal living were being discussed in Europe. Edward Bellamy's novel, *Looking Backwards* described a plausible utopia, giving equality to all, and ideas such as these were growing in popularity in Australia.<sup>54</sup> The scheme was to allow the poor to become prosperous independent farmers by means of hard work and thrift.<sup>55</sup> These ideas came at a time when Tasmania was in depression and the thought of self-sufficiency on the land was comforting. Men would be able to support themselves and would not be dependent on the soup kitchen.

Henry Dobson, then Premier, was interested in the village scheme and spent his own money on financing it. This was something that Henry Dobson was to do several times, to achieve his goals.<sup>56</sup> A lecture was held in 1893 on the benefits of a co-operative village and a committee of men was formed to provide Tasmania with its own settlement. The Village Settlement for some was a hope of relief from the depression; for others, like the Dobsons it was a social experiment. The scheme was resented in some quarters as a 'play thing of the philanthropic',<sup>57</sup> and in many ways, that is what it was. The idealism of a utopian commune was one of theory and was yet to be successfully put into practice over a prolonged length of time. In theory, if the scheme worked it would have alleviated some of the unemployment problems facing Tasmanians. The Southport settlement committee believed this gamble was worth the risk.

Committees were established, both male and female, but the less successful men's committee amalgamated with the women's committee and Emily Dobson was placed in effective control of the scheme.<sup>58</sup> After Government negotiations had taken place a group of settlers accompanied by Emily Dobson left on 25 October 1894 for Southport. Ten

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<sup>54</sup> P. Bolger, 'The Southport Settlement', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* Vol. 12 No. 4, 1965, p. 99

<sup>55</sup> A. Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania, 1803-1914', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1989, p. 214

<sup>56</sup> He personally funded Cookery Classes for school age girls and offered to sustain the Free Kindergarten Association for its first two years. *Mercury* 14 December 1906, p. 2; 27 June 1910, p. 2

<sup>57</sup> Bolger, 'The Southport Settlement', p. 104

<sup>58</sup> Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women', p. 215

men and women with eighteen children and ten tonnes of furniture made the trip. On Emily Dobson's return she presented a report to the committee full of enthusiasm. She reported that she had slept under a tent, as had the other settlers.<sup>59</sup> The settlement did not run smoothly. The scrub at Southport proved impenetrable and strong winds blew all the tents down. A few months later a bush fire burnt down all the huts and the timber planed for use was destroyed. The settlement struggled for three years before lack of public interest and settler commitment caused its failure. The settlers were not aware of how difficult life at Southport would be. After three years it was clear that their lives were not going to be comfortable. The *Clipper* accused Emily Dobson of trying to act as patron of the poor by using other people's money, the money raised by the public. The settlement was paternalistic but Emily Dobson and her committee had put a lot of work into the scheme.<sup>60</sup> Six families remained on the land out of the twenty-eight that had left for Southport.<sup>61</sup> The ultimate failure was due to a set of natural disasters, lack of continued community support and insufficient planning.

In 1899 at the ICW Congress, Emily Dobson spoke on her experiences of communal living. In an interview on her return to Tasmania, she said she had spoken at length on:

Co-operation and profit sharing. According to the other speakers this had proved successful, but my experience in the working of the Village Settlement, led me to the conclusion that co-operation in labour and agriculture is not feasible in practical life. The strong will not work for the weak ... and the weak will not be content to receive less than the strong.<sup>62</sup>

The Southport settlement failed in Tasmania as did the Village settlements across the nation but the experience was beneficial to Emily Dobson in her NCW work, and she was able to, share that experience with an international community through the ICW.

Emily Dobson was president of both the Ministering Children's League (MCL) and the Victoria Convalescent Home before she began her work in the National Council. Both these organisations were affiliated with the NCW. They were also connected, as the

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<sup>59</sup> Bolger, 'The Southport Settlement', p. 109

<sup>60</sup> Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women', p. 215

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson', p. 40

<sup>62</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 23 December 1899, p. 8

Convalescent Home was supported primarily by the fundraising activities of the MCL, which in 1889 paid for 52 children and men to be admitted.<sup>63</sup> The MCL was established in Hobart in 1892. Its aim was to promote, 'kindness, selflessness and the habit of usefulness among children'.<sup>64</sup> The desire was to encourage children to help the needy. Groups were established around Hobart with Emily Dobson as president of the combined groups. The Convalescent Home was located at Lindisfarne and was established to provide for unwell, poor women.<sup>65</sup> It was established as a memorial to the 'Queen's long reign' and was a success from the outset.<sup>66</sup> Emily Dobson's work in these organisations pre-dated her National Council work but they do help to illustrate the work that she was interested in.

Once a member of the National Council, Emily Dobson remained involved with numerous philanthropic organisations, but as President of the National Council she gained prestige as she commanded respect and admiration around the world. She was Tasmanian President, Australian President, a member of the executive of the International Council of Women and was elected vice-president of the International Council. At the request of Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister of Australia, she represented the Australian Government at the International Women's Suffrage Association in Amsterdam.<sup>67</sup> Little is known of Emily Dobson's childhood and it is difficult to say how much influence her parents had on her character as they both died when she was young. She appears to have taken after her mother with her sense of social obligation and duty. In the 1840s that meant being godmother to the children of the community, in the 1890s it was feeding the poor at a soup kitchen and in the early 1900s it was representing Australia at international congresses.

The fact that Emily Dobson's first activities in the public sphere coincided with her husband's debut into politics is probably not a coincidence. Perhaps as the wife of the Premier she felt a sense of responsibility to Tasmanians, which is seen in her attempts to run the soup kitchen. Perhaps the need in the community had reached a point where she could no longer happily remain silent on health issues, such as her work to establish the

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<sup>63</sup> *The Cyclopaedia of Tasmania*, p. 222

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, 'Mrs Henry Dobson', p. 57

<sup>65</sup> M. Roe, *Life Over Death: Tasmanians and Tuberculosis* (Hobart, 1999) p. 51

<sup>66</sup> A. Alexander, *The Eastern Shore: A History of Clarence* (Rosny Park, 2003) p. 78; *The Cyclopaedia of Tasmania*, p. 222

<sup>67</sup> *Mercury* 22 May 1923, p. 4

WSA. Her debut into the public sphere may be attributed to the fact that her own family was mostly grown and she was able to commit herself to the wellbeing of other people's children, like in her work with the MCL. Whatever her motivation, in 1891 Emily Dobson began working in community interest groups.

The personality of Emily Dobson can only be suggested from the various reports about her. She did not leave a diary and she has only one surviving grandchild who has vague but interesting recollections. Emily Dobson appears to have been a formidable woman. Her granddaughter who was fifteen at the time of Emily Dobson's death remembers stark obedience and fear of her grandmother. She always wore black and insisted that children were to be seen and not heard. Emily Dobson's youngest daughter, Marguerite, was described by her niece as shy, retiring and uncomfortable in the limelight – the opposite to her mother.<sup>68</sup> Emily Dobson desired children to be raised properly in a dignified manner. She was not radical and although she worked in the public sphere, travelled widely and was involved with international organisations, it is clear that she believed that women should first be wives and mothers. Emily Dobson was a classic expediency feminist. She worked outside the private sphere, primarily to help and elevate the position of women and children.

Impressions of Emily Dobson are gained through newspaper reports and minute book references. In these early years it was clear that she was, in some respects, the dictator of the NCWT. She told the NCWT what its interest was and then pursued that with vigour. As president of the Council she had prestige, respect and it appears an amount of obedience from members. While Emily Dobson was away attending NCW or ICW meetings the NCWT was inactive. There are very few examples of anything done by the NCWT without Emily Dobson present and certainly no important decisions were made. Whether this was due to reverence for Emily Dobson's position or simply apathy is not clear. The impression is given that in these early years, while the president was away the Council members were able to relax. Other members of the Council were similar to Emily Dobson (discussed in chapter ten). All National Council women were members of multiple organisations and all worked for the betterment of the Tasmanian community and the advancement of women. However, Emily Dobson was exceptional. She

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Gladys Dobson 1 August 2002

involved herself in the philanthropic community more than any other woman and became synonymous with the National Council in Tasmania, and without her influence and guidance it is likely that the Council would have discontinued. It is evidenced repeatedly how the NCWT began work in an area of interest but before any tangible results could be seen it collapsed. It is possible that without Emily Dobson's influence the National Council too would have collapsed.

## CHAPTER TWO – EDUCATION

The National Council of Women of Tasmania had interests in a wide variety of areas affecting Tasmanian society between 1899 and 1914. Its interest in education was minimal and confined primarily to a preoccupation with domestic training for girls. However the Council did explore other areas which can be loosely placed under the heading ‘practical and intellectual education’. It moved towards establishing training for mental and physically handicapped people, made reading material available for people without access to a library and held some educational public lectures. Innovations like the Every Day Cookery Classes or the Brabazon Society were attempts by the National Council to educate people outside Tasmania’s education system. The Council could not directly change the policy of the Education Department but it did exert some influence.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Bird caused great excitement at the NCWT annual congress in 1901 when she announced that she would use her influence to persuade her husband in his position as Minister for Education to assist them gain a subsidy to enlarge their educational campaigns; this was loudly applauded, but did not make a difference.<sup>2</sup> The NCW was occasionally progressive in its thoughts on education; it believed that it should not be a mere cramming of facts into the head of the student, easily forgotten; education was to be a two-fold system developing the students’ perceptions, and acquiring practical and useful knowledge. But the conservative Council found it absurd that poor girls were being taught reading, writing and arithmetic when they knew nothing of basic hygiene and cookery.<sup>3</sup>

### Domestic Science

The ‘domestic servant question’ was a widespread phenomenon and referred to the fact that a well-trained, motivated domestic servant was very difficult to find. Domestic service was a common occupation of women in the lower classes and the ICW believed that the role of domestic servants should be respected, their work should be classed as skilled labour and that the status of domestic servants be raised. Domestic Service was the most common full-time work for Australian women. In Tasmania in 1901, 5474

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<sup>1</sup> Tasmanian Education Department records for this time do not include reference to domestic science or the National Council of Women. Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), ED 120; AC 94

<sup>2</sup> *Tasmanian News* 4 May 1901, p. 8

<sup>3</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 11 May 1901, p. 7



women were classified as domestic servants, 3.2 per cent of the female population.<sup>4</sup> Many Australian girls entered domestic service at fourteen and stayed until they married.<sup>5</sup> The conditions they endured were generally poor. They worked long hours, up to sixteen hours a day in hot stuffy houses, in exchange for poor salaries, inferior food and accommodation. They were made to wear humiliating uniforms, which they often had to supply themselves.<sup>6</sup> Domestic service was most highly regulated in Australia during the convict assignment system, but after transportation ended, regulations lapsed.<sup>7</sup> The average Australian household could only afford one servant; known as 'generals', these women were expected to take on a variety of household duties.<sup>8</sup>

It was an expectation that the ideal 'Victorian' lady would leave physical labour to the servants but in Australia servants were often either difficult to find or proved unsatisfactory. In 1859 only twelve per cent of Australian families had servants compared with fifty percent in England.<sup>9</sup> Like the ICW the NCW of New Zealand (NCWNZ) wanted to raise the status of servants, for them to be seen as a skilled labour force. The NCWNZ had become interested in the plight of domestic servants shortly after its foundation in 1896. At its first meeting examples of 'sweating' were given, cases where domestic servants were expected to work from 5am till 10pm for four shillings a week, and it was claimed that even the richest New Zealand families only paid six shillings a week and expected girls to provide their own uniforms.<sup>10</sup> The NCWNZ agreed in principle to a standard eight-hour day and minimum wage, but did not go any further.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the ICW or the NCWNZ the Tasmanian Council was not really concerned with conditions, but training. The actions taken by the NCWT to secure adequate training were part of a trend in the British Empire to solve this problem.<sup>12</sup> Under the leadership of Emily Dobson, the NCWT hoped to train local girls in domestic service and worked to

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania, 1803-1914', Unpublished Phd Thesis, University of Tasmania, 1989, p. 79

<sup>5</sup> A. Alexander, *A Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001), p. 49

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, p. 68

<sup>7</sup> B. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* (Melbourne, 2002) p. 174

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, p. 68

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, p. 29

<sup>10</sup> D. Page, *The National Council of Women: A Centennial History* (Auckland, 1996) p. 19

<sup>11</sup> Page, *The National Council of Women*, p. 19

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Post* 14 January 1914, p. 3

establish a domestic training school. This was not achieved by 1914 but the NCWT did have some success. This change in focus makes it difficult to understand the NCWT's motives. Did properly trained domestic servants help the servants or the employers? The NCWT felt it had a duty to educate young girls on the importance of domestic work, and Aquila agreed:

The idea of a training college, where girls could be taught the right way of doing household work, and made to understand the scientific reason why dust and dirt is so injurious to health, beauty and character, and that there is a right and a wrong way of cooking even a mutton chop or a potato, is a good one.<sup>13</sup>

Although it does appear that the NCWT's primary goal was to increase the standards of paid help, it seems to have believed the training would benefit the girl. It assumed that the qualifications domestic servants would gain would make it easier for them to find and maintain employment. A campaign began that involved three distinct stages between 1899 and 1914 but carried on in various forms until 1940. Stage one involved a self-sufficient institution to train girls in domestic service. Stage two was a small short-term school for younger girls. Stage three was the Government's addition of domestic training to the educational curriculum of Tasmania. In each of these stages the NCWT's direct involvement became less. It partly achieved its goal, with domestic training commencing. Members' husbands, many of who were members of government, probably gave assistance.<sup>14</sup>

The National Council's attempt to establish a domestic training school became the longest running campaign of its early years and in particular, was a preoccupation of Emily Dobson's. In late 1900 Aquila urged women to support Emily Dobson in her mission:

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<sup>13</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 23 December 1899, p. 8

<sup>14</sup> Examples are: Henry Dobson, premier of Tasmania 1892-1894, husband of Emily Dobson; Sir John Dodds, Administrator of Tasmania between 1900-1901 and Attorney-General, husband of Lady Dodds; Hon. R.S Bird, MLC, husband of Mrs Bird; and Hon. W.B Propsting, Minister for Education and Tasmanian Premier 1903-1904, husband of Mrs Propsting. Also the Viscount Gormanston, Governor of Tasmania, husband of the Viscountess Gormanston, the first president and patroness of the NCWT.

No one doubts that it would be an excellent institution if it could once be set going ... Mrs Dobson means to start it. So the Hobart ladies may as well stand by her, when a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, may work wonders.<sup>15</sup>

The National Council proposed to start a training school for domestic servants in conjunction with a ladies' club. Ten women lodgers at the club were to meet the costs by paying £1 per week, making a total of £520 pa. Meals were to be supplied by students in a public restaurant at cheap rates and the girls would take in washing and mending to teach them the skills they needed. To meet additional costs it was suggested that anyone who wanted good domestic help should pay £1 each year in subscription to this 'ladies' club'.<sup>16</sup> In early 1901 a letter was published in the Hobart newspapers by the National Council asking Hobart residents their opinion of the 'ladies' club' to ascertain the community support. While it received pleasing responses to the advertisements and decided to go ahead with the scheme, it also received some criticism. A cartoon showing a woman serving at the feet of a gentleman was published with the caption, 'ladies' club! Monstrous.'<sup>17</sup> Russet, the Launceston women's correspondent to the *Tasmanian Mail*, remarked the following week, 'don't the men of Hobart approve of the proposed club for women? Your illustration in last week's "Mail" would lead one to imagine that they shudder at the thought.'<sup>18</sup> Russet was the biggest supporter of the ladies' club in the Tasmanian press. The reports of the ladies' club became less optimistic and the first stage in the campaign for properly trained domestic servants ultimately failed.

The plan to establish a school for domestic training was received well in the press. The *Clipper* remarked that:

Mrs Henry Dobson brought forward a scheme for procuring high-class domestic training for girls, girls of all classes ... and such training would raise the 'slavey' to the competent, self-respecting and respected domestic, and would save the temper and health of the mistress.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 10 November 1900, p. 8

<sup>16</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 24 August 1901, p. 7

<sup>17</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 21 September 1901, p. 19

<sup>18</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 28 September 1901, p. 7

<sup>19</sup> *Clipper* 24 August 1901, p. 7

The *Clipper* seemed to be indicating that a domestic training school would raise the respect for domestic servants but was probably being ironic. The National Council did not claim to be raising the status of domestic servants. It was attempting to obtain better domestic help for the upper classes; but this would never win the support of the working class. If the scheme was to be successful, it had to be presented differently. The National Council's original scheme changed to encompass basic domestic training for all girls. There is a difference in appearance and motive between a 'ladies Club' to train girls to be the servants of club members, and a government controlled cookery school for girls to learn home-making skills. Emily Dobson had to broach the concept differently if she was going to succeed. This change became stage two, which began in 1905.

This was essentially a training school created by Premier Evans and the Minister for Education. Henry Dobson personally provided the funding for the first thirty children to start the school.<sup>20</sup> It cannot possibly be a coincidence that Henry Dobson financially supported this school. His wife had become pre-occupied with creating a cookery training school in Hobart. She was unable to engage sufficient support from her NCWT associates or from the Tasmanian community to start the ladies' club, so she used her husband's money and influence. This was not a success of the National Council, but of the Dobson family. It was based on thirty children attending weekly classes over a ten-week period. It was hoped that this initial step would encourage the state government to continue to fund training as part of state education. The second stage of the scheme was only mildly successful. While the classes gave Tasmanian primary school girls some basic cookery skills, they were a long way from providing a competent domestic servant.

Emily Dobson attempted to introduce cookery classes but these were never established. In April 1907, Emily Dobson announced that she was in the process of arranging cookery classes at the Hobart Crèche (affiliated with the National Council) and hoped that this would form the nucleus of a school of domestic cookery in southern Tasmania.<sup>21</sup> If this announcement was followed through, there are no records to support it. It would seem that this school was never created.

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<sup>20</sup> *Mercury* 14 December 1906, p. 2

<sup>21</sup> *Mercury* 16 April 1907, p. 5

The third stage in the training of domestic skills began in May 1907 when the Educational Department of Tasmania announced the beginning of cookery classes as part of the curriculum. It is probable that this was part of a trend in other Australian states. Classes were not intended to train servants but to give all girls a basic understanding of domestic economy. This was part of a new educational trend, to provide children with a rounded practical education.<sup>22</sup> The *Mercury* gave a profoundly masculine view of this new development:

There can be no hesitation in expressing pleasure at the fact that a cookery school is to be established. Very few men care greatly if their wives are unable to give a list of the Kings of England, but very many care greatly if they can cook ... the larger proportion [of women] need to have knowledge of domestic economy and cookery, and their failure often makes the difference between a comfortable and uncomfortable home.<sup>23</sup>

There were to be six classes, with twenty girls in each. The course was to run one day a week for six months and it was hoped that each girl would be able to attend during her time of compulsory schooling. Teachers selected girls to attend and included students from city, suburbs and country areas, so long as they had access to a railway station. The department paid the train fare of any girls living beyond two kilometres from the school.<sup>24</sup> The girls were taught how to shop, prepare and serve meals as well as cleaning and hygiene. It was emphasised that the girls be taught how to cook foods that were affordable to their families and to them in later life. Although this was not exactly what the National Council had hoped for, it was a move in what it considered the right direction.

The NCWT was not given any credit for the formulation of these cookery classes, although, in light of its attempts to establish classes such as these, it must have had an influence, and was in full support of the classes. One example was a 'Conversazione' it ran with all proceeds donated to the training.<sup>25</sup> However this was an isolated example and does not prove a sustained effort. A woman wrote to the *Mercury* commenting that the

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<sup>22</sup> AOT, ED 120 and AC 94

<sup>23</sup> *Mercury* 4 May 1907, p. 4

<sup>24</sup> *Mercury* 4 May 1907, p. 4

<sup>25</sup> *Mercury* 21 June 1907, p. 6

new classes would improve the comfort of homes and was clearly in favour of the training:

The new subject in the Education Department ... should be more rejoiced over than any other improvement ... I believe we could get plenty of good servants, if only our girls were taught by someone how to conduct themselves in a useful and becoming way; but as it is, the majority of them are so very ignorant of how to be respectful that we hardly think of them as being respectable, and so decline to have them in our homes.<sup>26</sup>

These cookery classes were not meant to provide a new generation of trained servants to the middle and upper classes of Hobart but this idea was certainly seized upon, as the above quote illustrates. The cookery classes were established to teach girls the basic necessities of home life needed as a wife and mother; and would perhaps train some girls destined for service. The National Council's goal had not been achieved. They had originally wanted a school primarily for the training of domestic servants but instead cookery classes for grade six children was the result.

At the 1908 annual congress of the NCWT Emily Dobson commented that cookery schools were not enough, the Council still wanted a school for domestic training and only then 'the domestic servant problem would be at an end.'<sup>27</sup> In early July 1908 the Alexandra School of Domestic Economy and Hygiene was opened in Macquarie Street, Hobart. The proprietor is unknown. The school was designed to educate women wanting self-improvement, to become teachers, to enter domestic service or wanting specialist training as laundresses, cooks or housekeepers.<sup>28</sup> This new college was established in the hopes of:

Promoting the comforts of the home, and showing how the best results can be obtained from available income, to make labour more effective by better provision for the health and well-being of the household, to improve the status of domestic

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<sup>26</sup> *Mercury* 6 June 1907, p. 2

<sup>27</sup> *Mercury* 27 February 1908, p. 5

<sup>28</sup> *Mercury* 30 June 1908, p. 2

workers, and attract a capable class of girls, thoroughly taught and fitted for all duties.<sup>29</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that the NCWT was involved in this school or that it was long running. Emily Dobson was not present at the opening, as she was away at the ICW Geneva conference during July 1908. This school cannot have been successful, as in 1916 there were renewed calls for a domestic economy school in Hobart. Women's groups, including the NCWT continued to raise the issue of domestic training, but received little encouragement from the Education Department, 'which seemed to think that money spent on domestic arts was money taken from other more important parts of the system.'<sup>30</sup>

There were no quick solutions to the domestic servant problem. By 1914 the National Council began discussing the idea of transporting servants from England. The NCWT was not unique in desiring the establishment of a domestic training school for girls; schools such as these had been established around the country. The National Council lost sight of a larger issue during this process, although this does not seem to have occurred to the women. Servants in Australia and around the world were working in slave-like conditions. They worked for low wages in the homes of the wealthy. The NCWT tried to establish training schools, as part of the Education Department so that every state-school girl, whether destined for service or not, would receive the basic training. Domestic skills were thought not only to enhance the desirability of girls as servants, but would also make them more attractive as wives and mothers. The NCWT, often conservative in their outlook, believed this was the best and highest occupation for a woman.

### **Every Day Cookery Classes**

The Launceston Every Day Cookery Classes were an initiative of the Launceston branch of the NCWT. The National Council could boast very few initiatives in its early years but the cookery classes were one of them. In December 1899 an executive committee was formed to establish cookery classes in Launceston. The classes began in January 1900. The secretary of the Launceston NCW, Mrs Thrower, reported in May 1901, 'the classes

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<sup>29</sup> *Mercury* 9 July 1908, p. 7

<sup>30</sup> D. Phillips, *Making More Adequate Provision: State Education in Tasmania, 1839-1985* (Hobart 1985) p. 208

have been established with a view of teaching good, useful, simple and nourishing meals for morning, midday or evening'.<sup>31</sup> This was an accomplishment of the NCWT in its early years, and was its only tangible achievement. It was hoped that a similar school would be established in Hobart but nothing substantial was done. The NCWT saw classes such as these as essential to happy home life and could not understand why the government did not establish similar institutions:

It seems strange indeed that our legislators are so slow to grasp the great importance to girls of acquiring a sound knowledge of the methods of preparing food used in their homes. Health, happiness and worldly prosperity depend in a great measure upon this knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that the Launceston cookery classes continued. Any details on the classes, in regards to attendance and curriculum are also absent from the NCWT records. They probably folded due to a lack of community interest.

### **Brabazon Society**

The Brabazon Society of Tasmania was based on an English concept to teach some industrial skills to the poor women in the workhouses and lunatic asylums of the United Kingdom. It was founded by the Countess of Meath who was also involved with NCW work. The Hobart branch was an initiative of Emily Dobson, but the NCWT claimed credit. It was started in 1900 at the New Town Charitable Institution, with the aim of 'teaching people skills who are lacking the faculties of every day life.'<sup>33</sup> Emily Dobson attempted to start another Brabazon Society at the Launceston Benevolent Asylum, but they were less eager to establish this until the New Town Society had proved a success.<sup>34</sup> Some philanthropic women, like Emily Dobson, apparently endeavoured to widen the sphere of the society's influence by training disabled and aged people and not just the mentally infirm or poor.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Examiner* 26 April 1901, p. 6

<sup>32</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 25 May 1901, p. 7

<sup>33</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 14 July 1900, p. 7

<sup>34</sup> J. Brown, *Poverty is not a Crime: The Development of Social Services in Tasmania, 1803-1900* (Hobart, 1972) p. 159

<sup>35</sup> *Mercury* 10 August 1901, p. 35



To some the idea of promoting skilled industries among old women in charitable institutions may seem chimerical; but experiment and experience are the best standards of judgement, and already the limited operations of the society in the charitable institution at New Town have been attended with by substantial and encouraging success.<sup>36</sup>

The work of the society was to give disadvantaged people a means of 'getting out of themselves' however late in life. It was claimed that, 'Mrs Dobson learnt the industries promoted by the society, and taught them to Tasmanian ladies, who now, in turn instruct the women inmates of the charitable institution.'<sup>37</sup> This society was affiliated with the NCWT immediately after its foundation and seems to have flourished but apart from a few minor mentions in newspapers it did not receive much attention. After Emily Dobson returned from a trip in 1903 she went to the Brabazon Society 'to spend afternoon tea, the ladies told her they were very glad to see her back.'<sup>38</sup> This society grew increasingly absent from newspaper reports and by 1914 it had not been mentioned for many years. As the society did not leave any records, there is no way of telling how long it existed, or with what success. The lack of newspaper reports would indicate that it was not long term.

### **Educating Women to Vote**

The NCWT was not active in securing the womanhood suffrage in Tasmania; that was primarily the work of the WCTU. The WCTU began campaigning for the suffrage in 1893 when it established its franchise department and attempted to pressure the government. It has been said that 'Tasmania had no other organisation except the National Council of Women to extend the parameters of the suffrage debate outside the prescriptive issues of temperance and social purity.'<sup>39</sup> But there is little evidence to suggest this. The NCW records for the earlier period 1899 till 1905 have not been kept and therefore it cannot be clearly seen what the National Council's role was. However, contemporary daily newspapers reported explicitly on the National Council's meetings and congresses. The first reference to the National Council and the suffrage appeared in March 1903, just months before the vote was granted. Discussion was solicited after

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<sup>36</sup> *Mercury* 10 August 1901, p. 35

<sup>37</sup> *Mercury* 10 August 1901, p. 35

<sup>38</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 21 November 1903, p. 9

<sup>39</sup> V. Pearce, 'A Few Viragos on a Stump: The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania, 1880-1920, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association* Vol. 32 No. 4, 1985, p. 154

Jessie Rooke (discussed in chapter ten) presented a paper on the suffrage. Jessie Rooke and Mrs Mercer, wife of Bishop Mercer spoke in favour of the franchise, while Lady Braddon and Lady Lewis (wife of Sir Neil Elliot Lewis, Tasmanian Premier 1899-1903)<sup>40</sup> were less convinced. Lewis commented that, 'if the franchise was extended to women she thought it would take her a good deal of time away from her home during election times.'<sup>41</sup> The National Council only became involved in the franchise after 1903 once it had been granted to women.

It appears that the suffrage question became tainted in some respects by the activities of the British suffragettes; their 'outrageous' attempts to secure the vote included vandalism, writing graffiti and breaking windows, assaulting police and politicians and arson for which they were arrested. They used hunger strikes routinely as a method of speeding release until officials condoned force-feeding of women inmates.<sup>42</sup> This appears to have turned some women and men against the idea and critics claimed that women were not responsible and capable of handling the responsibility. Mary Bisdee (discussed in chapter ten) spoke in favour of the suffragettes at a meeting of the National Council in 1910. She believed, 'if Tasmanian ladies had been treated in the same way in regards to their vote as the English ladies, they would probably have acted in the same way as the suffragettes. She hoped that the suffragettes would attain their end yet.'<sup>43</sup> These remarks were met with loud dissent from the audience. Similar sentiments were expressed by Edith Waterworth, writing under the pseudonym of Hypatia in 1911. She wrote about the recent suffrage procession in England noting that:

There were 40,000 women, representing all countries in the procession which was organised by the Women's Social and Political Unions. It was five miles long, the women marching seven abreast. Seventy bands took part in it ... then, dressed in white, came seven hundred suffragettes who had served sentence in prison ... It seems strange to us in democratic Australia where the suffrage has been put into our hands almost without struggle that in England there are 700

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<sup>40</sup> S. Bennett, 'Sir Neil Elliot Lewis (1858-1935)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 10, pp. 94-95

<sup>41</sup> *Examiner* 14 March 1903, p. 6

<sup>42</sup> A. Rosen, *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-1914* (Boston, 1974) *passim*

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Post* 19 February 1910, p. 2

women who have gone to prison to get it. We surely do not appraise our privileges at their true value.<sup>44</sup>

In 1910 the National Council issued calls to limit universal suffrage as they saw inadequacies with a system that gave lawmakers and lawbreakers an equal vote. 'The qualification for those enfranchised should be the earning of a certain wage, the payment of a certain amount of rent and taxes, or the possession of landed estate or property.'<sup>45</sup> This was a very conservative view of universal suffrage and illustrates that the women of the National Council were probably not fighting alongside the WCTU for the vote. Some of the women represented by the National Council did not want the vote extended to all women.<sup>46</sup>

In an effort to educate women on how best to use their vote, the Women's Suffrage Association was started by Jessie Rooke in both Hobart and Launceston in 1903 after the federal franchise had been granted. The organisation was created independently from the WCTU and was affiliated with the NCWT. Its aim was to educate women in their duty as voters; it encouraged women to join electoral rolls and not align with any one party.<sup>47</sup> In Hobart, the women involved were familiar to both the WCTU and the NCWT. The president elected was Ida McAulay; the vice presidents, Mrs Mercer, Stafford-Bird and Walker, treasurer was Ellen Lodge and the Secretary, Mary Bisdee.<sup>48</sup> Ida McAulay (1858-1949) was a prominent Tasmanian woman who did not join the National Council. She was active in the Itinerants literary society and was a prominent suffrage advocate.<sup>49</sup> About this new Association Russet commented, 'I make out that no matter how little we appreciate our "equality" with man, the time has now come when we shall have to recognise that our vote is of value.'<sup>50</sup> In 1910 Emily Dobson commented at a meeting of the National Council that:

Women were more or less on trial at present with regard to the suffrage, and must be careful what they did. She did not think they should ask for seats in the

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<sup>44</sup> AOT NS 4/1, Newspaper Clippings of Hypatia, 12 August 1911

<sup>45</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1910, p. 8

<sup>46</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1910, p. 8

<sup>47</sup> Pearce, 'A Few Viragos on a Stump', p. 158

<sup>48</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 26 September 1903, p. 9

<sup>49</sup> L. Ikin, 'Ida McAulay: A Life', Unpublished BA Hons Thesis, University of Tasmania, 1994, *passim*

<sup>50</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 3 October 1903, p. 9

legislature, nor must they do what the suffragettes had done in England. They must be very careful, too, what they did at election time. Women had got a vote, and had been educated politically, and could do their part in the great issue now before the country ... During election times women should not, in Mrs Dobson's opinion play golf, tennis and bridge.<sup>51</sup>

This is a curious statement. Emily Dobson seems to be concerned that women could lose the franchise, but this possibility was at no point suggested. She was concerned with propriety but was she taking politics seriously? She was implying that it was not enough for women to be politically active; they needed to appear to be as well. Did women need to show men that they were above such diversions as golf and tennis on Election Day? This was an unrealistic expectation and sounds simplistic, ignorant and elitist. Perhaps this is more a reflection of her social agenda of activities during election time, than the activities of middle or working class women.

### **Other Areas**

Other educational areas were discussed very briefly by the Council but nothing was achieved. It discussed two initiatives involving libraries. Travelling libraries involved books collected and distributed to remote areas. Although support was received for this, the scheme was never implemented. Children's home libraries were also discussed but saw similar results. This was to provide small collections of books in neighbourhoods for children to share. But although the project was initially well received, it was not sustained. The Council also began work to provide monthly educational lectures which ended abruptly only months after commencing and were not continued. Finally it examined the feasibility of Educational and Employment Bureaus. This was an initiative of the ICW and would have involved a massive Australia-wide effort from the National Councils to establish a network of employment agencies for teenagers. The Tasmanian Council lacked the ability to bring this to fruition.

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<sup>51</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1910, p. 8

## CHAPTER THREE – HEALTH AND MORALITY

The National Council of Women of Tasmania was not highly motivated in the area of health care but was perhaps more so in moral issues, which will be discussed shortly. During this early period, 1899 till 1914, there was progress in women and children's health in which the National Council did not become involved. The Queen Alexandra Maternity Hospital was established and a children's ward at the Royal Hobart Hospital was created. Although National Council women, such as Emily Dobson, were involved in the committees created to establish these, and the Maternity Hospital affiliated with the National Council, there is no mention of the National Council supporting these developments. During these early years the NCWT discussed the health concerns of tuberculosis and the high rates of infant mortality. It also briefly discussed the insanitary housing of Hobart slums, but it did not produce any tangible changes. It is still, however, necessary to examine the little work that the NCWT did undertake in the area of health care to gain a full impression of its interests. The impact of the NCWT on Tasmanian society was not through the work it produced but through the issues it discussed; the NCWT acted in an advisory capacity, seeing itself as a facilitator rather than a labourer. Health, morality and welfare were typically the concern of expediency feminists during this period. These women justified entry into the public sphere because as nurturers it was their role.

### **Tuberculosis**

The National Council began discussing tuberculosis in 1906 and although they continued to examine the problem until 1914 and beyond, nothing was actually done. Tuberculosis was a serious problem in Australia but until 1920 it was less serious in Tasmania than in other parts of the mainland.<sup>1</sup> In 1906 Dr Wolfhagen gave a paper on the treatment of tuberculosis at the National Council congress. His wife and daughter were both National Council members. He suggested ways of avoiding the contraction of tuberculosis by simple hygiene principles. He suggested that spitting in the streets should be avoided, and quarantine of children and houses affected by tuberculosis should be maintained. Inappropriate housing was cited as the cause of infection, overcrowding in damp, dark houses; houses built back to back and with underground kitchens were also potential problems.<sup>2</sup> Although tuberculosis was discussed at NCWT congresses for six years it

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<sup>1</sup> M. Roe, *Life Over Death: Tasmanians and Tuberculosis* (Hobart, 1999) p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *Mercury* 17 February 1906, p. 2

was not an area in which the National Council made an effort to change. Perhaps it was too large an issue for the NCWT to undertake. The NCWT also discussed causes and the treatment and suggested a separate sanatorium for sufferers but this was all purely hypothetical.

In 1911 a paper on tuberculosis, read at the NCWT congress described the disease as 'one of the most curable of maladies when taken in its early stage.'<sup>3</sup> At the congress the following year any urgency in attempting to remedy the illness had declined. It was reported that: 'Tasmania, in proportion to population, has the lowest rate in Australia, of 0.3 per 1000 deaths, Victoria standing at 1.02. It is reasonable to suppose that the remarkable decrease in consumption of late years will be maintained.'<sup>4</sup> The National Council's interest in tuberculosis appeared genuine but it was never able to influence change. After six years of hearing occasional papers on the disease it faded out of its attention. Tuberculosis became a serious problem in Tasmania between 1920 and 1940<sup>5</sup> but the National Council's interest was never renewed.

### **Colony for Epileptics**

The idea for a colony for epileptics came from Victoria and was discussed briefly at the NCWT annual Congress in 1905 but not taken further. There does not seem to have been a big need for a home for epilepsy sufferers in Tasmania and this idea was not discussed again.<sup>6</sup> Given the size of the Tasmanian population in 1905 the number of epileptics was minimal. In the 1901 census, only fourteen persons were noted as suffering from epilepsy, 0.81 per cent of the population.<sup>7</sup>

### **Infant Mortality**

Infant mortality was an area of concern around Australia. The NCWT started discussing the issue in 1905 at its annual congress. Jessie Rooke said the problem was summed up under the headings of 'ignorance, indifference, pre-natal influences, lack of knowledge of the physical condition of infants; and also of the requirements of infants with regard to diet, clothing, habits, and use of alcohol.'<sup>8</sup> This was an extensive list. The primary cause

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily Post* 13 February 1911, p. 3

<sup>4</sup> *Mercury* 18 March 1912, p. 2

<sup>5</sup> Roe, *Life Over Death*, p. 1

<sup>6</sup> *Examiner* 17 March 1905, p. 7

<sup>7</sup> *Statistics of Tasmania*, 1905, p. 73

<sup>8</sup> *Examiner* 17 March 1905, p. 7

of infant death is unknown, but these reasons suggested by Jessie Rooke were certainly factors. In 1907, Dr John Elkington discussed infant mortality in Tasmania.<sup>9</sup> 'Out of 49,050 children born between 1896 and 1905 in Tasmania 4590 died before their first birthday. Compared with the other states Tasmania did not stand as well as she should when her natural advantages were considered.'<sup>10</sup>

The theoretical remedies offered by the National Council for the early death of infants were as diverse as the causes listed by Jessie Rooke. Education was suggested, to teach the sacredness of life, physiology and instruction for the feeding and rearing of infants, as well as treatment of their ailments. Providing pure sterilised milk for underfed and sickly babies of the poor, properly constructed houses, with approved sanitary surroundings and conditions and the distribution of leaflets containing simple rules of health, and suggestions regarding the care of infant were all recommended.<sup>11</sup> The National Council was not active in working to decrease the death rate in infants. Over the next few years it was urged by different sections to take up the issue but apart from discussion, nothing was done.

In 1907 Lady Edeline Strickland, wife of the Governor, spoke to the NCWT on infant mortality but with a different imperative. She believed that Australians must combat infant mortality or face the 'yellow peril'. She said:

If the Anglo-Saxons do not increase and multiply and fill the land within this century, China and Japan may do so for them – at least this is the reasonable fear of ninety percent of Australian Statesmen. It is therefore the duty of women to put a stop to infant mortality.<sup>12</sup>

The White Australia policy was prevalent at this time and as conservatives, the NCWT members were probably inline with this policy.<sup>13</sup> The 'yellow peril' was not mentioned again in regards to infant mortality and it seems likely that the National Council's interest

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<sup>9</sup> M. Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought, 1890-1960* (St Lucia, 1984) p. 89

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 13 March 1907, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 17 March 1905, p. 6

<sup>12</sup> *Mercury* 16 April 1907, p. 5

<sup>13</sup> G. Carmichael, 'So Many Children: Colonial and Post-Colonial Demographic Patterns', K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds.), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville, 1992) p. 113

in this area was solely due to concern for infants, rather than from a desire to populate the country. According to Statistics of Tasmania the death rate of infants under one years of age in 1890 was 146 per 1000 births. By 1913 that number was 76 per 1000,<sup>14</sup> almost half. By 1912 the imperative to combat infant mortality was declining. It was reported at the NCWT congress that:

Tasmania can claim to have shared in the decrease of late years; in fact, in 1909 we could claim not only to have the highest birth rate, 30.90, of any part of the Empire, but also the lowest infantile death rate of 65 per 1000. Tasmania ought to be proud of her position as heading the countries of the whole world in possessing the greatest relative natural increase of population.<sup>15</sup>

The National Council were not responsible by any means for the decline in the infant death rate in Tasmania. For a number of years the NCWT had discussed the issue and had been encouraged to become involved in finding a solution to the problem, but by 1912 the problem had been corrected by other means. The National Council failed to influence health care policy. It was through the work of the organisations that affiliated with the NCWT that this work was attempted. The organisation that probably had the most direct involvement was an affiliate of the National Council, the Women's Sanitary Association (discussed in chapter eleven).

It can be seen that the National Council did have an interest in regards to health matters but the fact that they did not attempt any work in this area seems to indicate that interest was not extensive. As the WSA and similar organisations had been working in health care for a number of years, there was no need for National Council to become actively involved. The National Council discussed tuberculosis and infant mortality in Tasmania but apart from attempting to educate women on hygiene principles, what more could they have done? The health care provisions in Tasmania were not perfect but the National Council did not become involved in areas where it could have done some good, such as fund raising for hospitals. It was created to co-ordinate activities rather than initiate work and health care is a good example of this. Through affiliation with the NCW organisations were kept abreast of the each other's activities. This may have been

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<sup>14</sup> S. Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South?* (Hobart, 1995) p. 153

<sup>15</sup> *Mercury* 18 March 1912, p. 2



possible without the NCW but it certainly would have been convenient to hear the reports of other welfare societies.

Why the National Council was interested in some areas of health and not other, more obvious areas is problematic. The NCWT discussed infant mortality but did not work for the creation of the children's hospital. They supported the maternity bonus but did not campaign for the creation of the women's hospital. The NCWT appears to have been more comfortable with discussion than influencing governmental programmes. As mentioned some of the women of the National Council were involved in the creation and fund raising for these hospitals and formed the auxiliary committees. Perhaps the National Council body saw no need to actually become involved in the ground work. These health facilities were established and then affiliated with the National Council which provided a forum for them and other health and charitable organisations to discuss their work. This should not be dismissed as insignificant or unimportant. Although it cannot be said that the NCWT actively improved health care in Tasmania, it can be suggested that it helped to facilitate the work of the existing health care organisations.

## MORALITY

The ideal woman of the Victorian era was dependent on either her husband or father; she was sexually chaste and morally upright. While men inhabited the public sphere of employment and politics, women inhabited the private sphere of the home, content to keep house and raise babies. Although not all women would have conformed to this stereotype, for many it was an ideal to aspire to. In this era in Australia 95 per cent of women married and 93 per cent of those marriages produced offspring. The ideal of womanhood was applied to all women, whether rich or poor, black or white.<sup>16</sup> Although the National Council began to transcend the traditional sphere of womanly influence, as an expediency feminist organisation, it remained committed to upholding the moral standards of the Victorian era. But women were gaining new rights and responsibilities, there were new employment opportunities and women had the ability to earn a private income, separate from that of their husbands. In many ways it was a new world; as the *Mercury* pointed out in 1903, 'a woman today cycles in knickers without alarming us.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A. Alexander, *A Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001) p. 21

<sup>17</sup> *Mercury* 14 January 1903, p. 7

The old values of the Victorian era still held firm within the ranks of the National Council, which tried to uphold the moral standards of the Tasmanian community. The National Council did not achieve anything substantial in this regard though this is not necessarily a criticism. It was clearly stated in its constitution that its purpose was not active work but the organisation and centralisation of the philanthropic organisations of Tasmania. The NCWT did attempt work in some areas that can be seen as involving moral principles. Examples of this included: its work to establish a curfew bell in Hobart, which would get young girls and boys off the streets at night and out of moral danger; discussion of the inappropriate clothing of young women; and the use of feathers as fashion items taken from endangered birds. It also briefly took an interest in gaol work.

### **Curfew Bell**

The WCTU first suggested a curfew bell to clean up the streets of morally reprehensible children as early as 1899 but had difficulty obtaining support.<sup>18</sup> They appealed to the NCWT to support a petition to the government in favour of the curfew in 1901 but the NCWT were, at that time, opposed to the curfew on health grounds; too many families had poorly ventilated homes and children were better off outdoors.<sup>19</sup> The National Council also objected on the grounds that children were safest under the jurisdiction of their parents. This point of view changed primarily because Emily Dobson became concerned with the moral well-being of children. This became increasingly apparent later in the century as she began to involve herself, independently of the National Council, in organisations like the Free Kindergarten Association or the Girl Guide Association. The National Council's attempt to introduce a curfew bell in Tasmania was an antecedent to Emily Dobson's preoccupation. The National Council recognised a need to protect the morally vagrant children on the streets of Hobart; the curfew suggestion was the first stage in establishing tighter control.

In 1910 the NCWT began to promote the idea of a curfew bell and this time there was more community support for the scheme. The curfew was discussed by several philanthropic organisations, including the Children's Protection Society who approached

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<sup>18</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT) Non-State (NS) 337/8, Minute Book of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, p. 27

<sup>19</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 1 June 1901, p. 8

the City Council.<sup>20</sup> Emily Dobson was in favour of a curfew and put her full weight behind the idea. The *Mercury* reported her address to the NCWT:

Mrs Dobson told her hearers that a few nights ago she saw a group of girls in the street, the youngest of whom could hardly have been more than twelve years old. Several youths went up to them and they all paired off. 'And I saw this and was powerless to prevent it,' said Mrs Dobson. The speaker advanced the suggestion that members of some body like the National Council might be invested with inspectoral powers, and be able to take home any young girls found in the streets late at night. They might be authorised to enter houses if necessary with a legal warrant.<sup>21</sup>

Not all the members of the NCWT were in favour of the idea. Sarah Hannaford (see chapter ten) was concerned about forcing children to stay inside inadequately ventilated homes. Similarly, Mrs Strong believed that in a climate such as Australia's it would be very hard to send children indoors at eight o'clock.<sup>22</sup> Despite the uneasy feelings of some NCWT members, the curfew bell was taken seriously. This time the suggestion was taken up by the Children's Protection Society and the Council of Churches who recorded their 'gratification at the steps taken by Mrs Dobson in relation to the curfew movement.'<sup>23</sup>

This reawakening of the curfew bell suggestion provoked debate in the media. The *Mercury* criticised the NCWT for exaggerating the problem to incite fear, but did recognise a problem existed.<sup>24</sup> The *Critic* thought that, 'if only girls could understand how forward behaviour repels boys, and if boys were compelled by law to stand the consequences of wrong doing, a different state of things would be gradually brought about,' but the *Critic* asked, 'Who is going to make the start to do something?'<sup>25</sup> The *Tasmanian News* similarly saw a problem:

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<sup>20</sup> *Mercury* 8 March 1910, p. 2

<sup>21</sup> *Mercury* 18 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> *Mercury* 18 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>23</sup> *Mercury* 18 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>24</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1910, p. 4

<sup>25</sup> *Critic* 26 February 1910, p. 4

The girls of tender years and upwards who perambulate the streets of Hobart after dark are positively brazenly rude. They address dissolute men and youths whom they have no acquaintance with, and the result is that hundreds of them reach the downward path at ages that should entitle them to a sound thrashing for their wrong doing.<sup>26</sup>

The Commissioner of Police, J. E Lord, responded to the call for tighter control over children in the streets after dark, but said the police had no jurisdiction to act in this matter. The children referred to did not come under the interpretation of neglected children and therefore under the *Youthful Offenders and Destitute Children's Act, 1896*, the police were unable to remove them.<sup>27</sup> The Children's Protection Society approached the Hobart City Council to endorse the curfew bell proposal, but under advice from its lawyers the City Council decided that the enactment of such a law was beyond their scope and was a matter for Government. It tried to appease the organisations pushing for the curfew, while trying to allow parents to maintain control over their own children. The discovery that they were unable to pass such a law allowed them to avoid responsibility, as an editorial in the *Examiner* showed:

The action of the city council in deciding that it had no power to pass a by-law introducing the curfew for the purpose of clearing the streets of the numerous short-frocked who gad about at night time, is regarded by some people as a neat way of disposing of a ticklish subject ... Curfew legislation, to be anyway effective, would as one alderman pointed out, necessitate the employment of an army of police. It is doubtful if it is desired that Hobart should become a police ridden community.<sup>28</sup>

The police and City Council claimed to be unable to act in the area of a curfew bell; they did not want to become involved but wanted to appease the pressure groups.

Emily Dobson regarded the curfew bell as necessary and once she had decided on a course of action there was little dissuading her. The curfew bell idea was an impractical suggestion, which no legally responsible body took seriously. The suggestion was hated

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<sup>26</sup> *Tasmanian News* 2 March 1910, p. 2

<sup>27</sup> *Mercury* 2 February 1910, p. 4

<sup>28</sup> *Examiner* 14 March 1910, p. 7

by working-class parents. The commencement of such a scheme would have been costly and ultimately unsuccessful because children would have gone elsewhere and evaded discovery by police. The practice of young people meeting in the city at night was probably not detrimental to their well-being but against the moral Victorian ideology of the upper class National Council. The suggestion of the curfew bell showed how out of touch with the community Emily Dobson and the National Council were.

Emily Dobson was prone to courses of action that ultimately made her look foolish and unaware of the situation of the people she was trying to assist. This can be seen in statements she made at a political meeting in 1910. In February during a political address to a group of women at Bellerive, she allegedly said of the Labor Party that, 'There is always a possibility of your children being taken away and placed in big communistic schools to be provided by the State, where they will be beyond your control.'<sup>29</sup> This caused outrage and Emily Dobson wrote to the *Daily Post* in an effort to correct the error, 'I shall be glad if you will give me equal publicity to the words I really used on that occasion ... "Can any mother or indeed any woman contemplate with indifference the idea of State-tended and educated children, apart from all home influence."' The editor of the *Daily Post* believed the words to carry the same meaning and was able to produce several women present at the address who would swear to the words originally quoted by the *Daily Post* as correct. This incident provoked a good deal of response from the public and can only have damaged Emily Dobson's and the NCWT's reputation and chances of enacting a curfew bell. Comments such as, 'I would like to see the party that would dare to attempt to take our children from us. The party to which Mrs Dobson belongs had gone nearer to it than we will ever suffer any other to go.'<sup>30</sup> And:

I said impertinence. I wish I could find a stronger term. Just fancy! A curfew bell. Also the cool assumption that immorality only exists in the ranks of the workers and artisans. And the remedy suggested! Sir, the workers haven't any time to be immoral, they have to slave too hard making wealth for the classes represented by the NCW.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Post* 22 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>30</sup> *Daily Post* 24 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Post* 24 February 1910, p. 2

Comments such as these illustrate how Emily Dobson was regarded by some of the people she was attempting to improve and how the National Council was viewed by those deemed to be morally inferior. Emily Dobson's foolish words reflected badly on herself and the NCW. She proved the critics of women in the public sphere correct by making an ignorant statement. This incident silenced debate on the curfew bell in the short term.

The NCW and other interested groups began looking at ways to entertain children, to distract them from immorality rather than placing them under house arrest each night. In 1912 Emily Dobson responded to remarks made by Admiral Sir George King-Hall that the girls of Hobart were particularly immoral. She replied that if the Girl Scout movement could get a good start in Hobart, 'it would be a grand thing. That would provide the girls with wholesome, pleasurable, excitement, occupation and diversion. The difficulty up to the present was to get scout mistresses.'<sup>32</sup> Emily Dobson had met with Agnes Baden-Powell, the sister of Lord Baden-Powell, in London in 1911 and was interested in the guiding movement. She was involved in the formation of the first Girl Guiding troop in Tasmania established at Lindisfarne in 1911 and she became its first Commissioner.<sup>33</sup> When the first Hobart troop was formed in 1921 meetings were held at Elboden House.<sup>34</sup> Emily Dobson appears to have felt that by providing girls with activities and a place to spend time she was partly tackling the problem of children roaming the streets at night.

### Gaol Work

It seems a contradiction that the National Council of Women of Tasmania, an organisation interested in the morals of young girls and women was not actively interested in the morality of prisoners in gaol. A reason for this may have been a desire not to associate with the criminal class. The National Council wanted to elevate the poor, but only the deserving poor, and criminals were not deserving. The only work attempted in this area was by affiliated organisations and members, in particularly through the work of one individual, Mrs Stafford Bird. More substantial gaol work was done through the auspices of the WCTU. This was an area in which the National Council was able to associate itself with work it was not actually involved in doing, but through the organisations affiliated with it.

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<sup>32</sup> *Mercury* 18 March 1918, p. 2

<sup>33</sup> B. C., Teniswood, *Guiding in Tasmania 1911-1973* (Hobart, 1974) pp. 3 and 16

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, *First Hobart Company of Girl Guides 1921-1942*, Tasmaniana Library

## Women's Clothing

The immorality of female clothing began to be called into question by the NCWT in 1909. At the interstate conference of the National Council it was resolved to ask each NCW worldwide to petition their governments to enact laws prohibiting women and children appearing on the stage or in public wearing immodest attire. They also asked that women become members of the boards created to oversee these laws.<sup>35</sup> Exactly what was meant by 'immodest attire' was not specified.

In 1910 the issue of girls dressing morally was again brought to the attention of the National Council, this time by Sarah Hannaford. She drew to the attention of the Council the unsuitable dressing habits of working class girls. This time the cause for alarm was not the lack of clothing but rather the type of clothing. Sarah Hannaford was concerned with girls of the working class dressing above their stations: 'A good deal of [the problem] originates with our own class, people sell their old clothes to second hand dealers, and working class girls buy them cheaply, and dress above their class.' Sarah Hannaford did add that she did not want the girls to look 'frumpy' but they could 'dress neatly in a nice fresh washing material.'<sup>36</sup> She said she knew of girls whose parents were in receipt of parish relief spending their money on cheap finery: 'it made her positively shudder at times to see them coming out with jewellery that they knew must be sham ... the way some girls dressed was immodest, and reform in this matter was need'.<sup>37</sup> These comments were not accepted well by the working community and showed the class divide between the women represented by the NCWT and working class women. One woman commented:

I have been a working girl and always tried to dress nicely, and if after long saving I was able to buy the material for a good dress, that material lasted me years, by turning and altering (methods unknown to the richer classes). They it appears, sell their unfashionable clothes to second hand dealers ... I venture to say that 90 per cent of the working girls of Hobart or Tasmania would rather stay at home than go out in the left off clothes of other people.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 2 March 1909, p. 5

<sup>36</sup> *Mercury* 28 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>37</sup> *Mercury* 28 February 1910, p. 2

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Post* 24 February 1910, p. 2

This incident draws attention to the very real gap between the rich and the poor in Hobart and shows how out of touch the National Council was with the plight of working girls. Instead of commending these girls for thrift in being able to clothe themselves by buying second hand, it admonished them for dressing above their station. This station was, of course decided by the upper classes; women such as the National Council members wanted to maintain the distinction between themselves and the working class. This showed the absurdity of the NCWT worrying about what type of clothes girls wore. Its interest in this aspect of morality was about maintaining the distance between themselves and the lower classes rather than morality as a whole.

### **Feathers in Women's Fashion**

The National Council's interest in immoral clothing was not confined to improper dress; it became particularly interested in the inhumane gaining of bird feathers for women's fashions. This is not strictly an issue of morality in the previously mentioned sense, but the inhumane way birds were killed for fashion was not agreeable. The ICW had first drawn this matter to the attention of the National Councils in 1899 at the London Quinquennial when it asked women to cease using egret feathers as it was endangering the egret population. Interest in endangered bird populations was common at this time in Britain.<sup>39</sup> The Tasmanian National Council began discussing the issue of bird feathers in fashion in 1909. At the interstate congress of the NCWT Adeline Stourton (see chapter ten) read a paper on the cruelties to birds of the latest fashions of women wearing feathers in their hats.<sup>40</sup> This provoked a response from a Victorian ostrich farmer who claimed that the NCWT's information was incorrect and that his ostriches were treated humanely.<sup>41</sup> The NCWT replied its interest was not directed at respectable ostrich farmers but at endangered species of birds that were killed for their feathers. In 1910 at the request of the Anti-Plumage League of NSW, the NCWT met to discuss the subject of women wearing plumage or feathers obtained by the injury and destruction of harmless birds. It was unanimously decided that it was desirable for a Tasmanian Anti-Plumage League to be established. The women signed a pledge stating that they would not purchase any plumage or feathers obtained by cruel means. Mary Roberts was elected

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<sup>39</sup> R. J., Moore-Coyles, 'Feathered Women and Persecuted Birds: The Struggle against the Plumage Trade, c. 1860-1922.' *Rural History* Vol. 11 No. 1, 2000, p. 57

<sup>40</sup> *Mercury* 1 March 1909, p. 6

<sup>41</sup> *Mercury* 13 October 1909, p. 7 Although this letter is considerably later than the NCWT congress, the letter did state that it was referring to the report in the *Mercury* from March 1909.



the first president of the league.<sup>42</sup> She had been a leader in animal rights in Tasmania for many years and ran the Beaumaris Zoo.<sup>43</sup> She was particularly interested in birds and had built up an 'impressive' collection at the Zoo.<sup>44</sup> Concern about the use of feathers was an interest of the ICW and although the NCWT took that matter on board it was not an important issue in Tasmania. Activity in this regard moved to the Anti-Plumage League and away from the Council. In this endeavour a need was identified and an appropriate action was taken.

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<sup>42</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 5 March 1910, p. 9

<sup>43</sup> *Mercury* 14 March 1910, p. 3

<sup>44</sup> E. Guiler, 'The Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* Vol. 33 No. 3, 1986, p. 121

## SUMMARY TO PART I

During the period from 1899 until 1914 the NCWT showed interest in a variety of areas with limited success. It expressed interest in practical education matters, shown in its work to create schools for domestic training and in cookery classes. It thought about children's libraries and it attempted to give the community access to books. It also attempted to provide public lectures and create employment bureaus. During this period the NCWT expressed an interest in the moral behaviour of the working class. This materialised as a desire to establish a curfew bell in an attempt to retrieve the morality of children. The NCWT also expressed an interest in the clothing worn by working class women and showed their aversion to the inhumane treatment of birds to satisfy a fashion trend for feathers. The NCWT discussed issues of health during this period. National Council members were lectured on the evils, causes and cures of tuberculosis; they lamented the infant mortality rates in Tasmania and were informed on how best to treat sane epileptics. This is not an extensive resume. As the *Mercury* commented, 'it is not surprising that with so vast a field before them much time has been taken up in discussion of methods that, so far, have had no practical result.'<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the NCW was stated as being the promotion of unity and mutual understanding between associations of women working for the common welfare of the community.<sup>2</sup> But this did not necessarily translate in reference to the Tasmanian National Council. What was the NCWT aiming to achieve in the work it undertook? As nothing substantial was achieved this is difficult to assess. There is no evidence of the NCWT promoting unity between any associations. It even had trouble unifying the northern and southern branches of the NCWT. Perhaps it encouraged a mutual understanding between organisations but there is no solid evidence to support this assertion. At annual NCWT congresses delegates from affiliated associations had the opportunity to present to the Council their work, which would have increased awareness among the philanthropic organisations of Tasmania. The extent to which this actually occurred is not known. The stated aim of the National Council does not appear to have been the aim of the Tasmanian National Council. It appears that the NCWT was trying to manipulate and control the working classes of Hobart to some extent. This can be seen in the attempts to create training for domestic servants as 'anyone who had tried to "do" with a girl who has

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<sup>1</sup> *Mercury* 12 February 1904, p. 4

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 11 May 1899, [p. 2]

not been properly trained'<sup>3</sup> would know, this was a serious preoccupation of the middle and upper classes. The attempt to establish control over the working class is also visible in the NCWT's efforts to have a curfew bell enacted and Emily Dobson's suggestion that the National Council might be invested with inspectorial powers to enter other people's houses is an example of this. To a lesser extent the NCWT's concern with how working class girls dressed and spent their money shows an unwanted interest in the lives of the working class that was not related to their wellbeing but the desire of some NCWT members to maintain the distinction between the upper and lower classes.

The motives of the NCWT are difficult to assess and it is important to read between the lines of the sources still in existence. As discussed in regard to domestic training, the NCWT's motive was to create a supply of competent servants. The ICW expressed a hope that all National Councils around the world would work to raise the standards and status of paid domestic service; the NCWT began trying to establish training schools. Its motive in trying to implement the curfew bell was to establish control and assert Victorian ideals of morality on to the working classes. It would be wrong to suggest that the work undertaken by the National Council was always from selfish motives, although it does appear this way at times. The National Council may have been misguided in the work it undertook but it appears to have been from a genuine belief that reform was necessary in certain areas; it was the belief that was incorrect rather than its motives.

The NCWT worked in areas that were suggested to them from either the ICW, National Councils from other states or from Emily Dobson. It was often at her instigation that a suggestion of work was put into practice or not. While Emily Dobson was overseas, attending ICW congresses or on other business, the activities of the NCWT would fall into a noticeable lull. Even the newspaper reports on the National Council declined when she was not in the state. Before Emily Dobson became president of the NCWT the role had been filled by a succession of Governors' wives, each with only a slight awareness of the National Council as an international body and its activities in Tasmania. An example of this was one of the Presidents, the wife of a governor, presenting the opening address at the annual congress at which she congratulated the NCWT on its twentieth year as a Council when it was only its third. Emily Dobson was very knowledgeable about

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<sup>3</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 10 November 1900, p. 8

National Council matters. She was the driving force of the NCWT and without her at the helm, it does seem highly probable that the NCWT would not have been in the position to provoke such vehement response because it simply would have been ignored as an organisation without any actual influence. Emily Dobson did dominate and control the NCWT to suit her specific agenda, but without that element of control, the National Council could have become just another women's social society, drinking tea and not bothering anyone.

The NCWT was seen differently by the Tasmanian community. Newspaper reports fluctuated from total admiration to disdain. The *Clipper* reproached the National Council for meddling in affairs that did not concern them while *Aquila* of the *Tasmanian Mail* praised their efforts. At times it appeared that the National Council was receiving community support but on each of its major areas of concern, namely domestic servants, curfew bell and working class clothing, the NCWT were admonished in letters to the editors of all major Tasmanian newspapers. The working-class community generally viewed the National Council as being out of touch with reality. They were seen as imposing irrelevant upper class values onto people who could not have cared less what these women thought.

The way National Council members saw themselves can only be suggested. The activities they undertook suggest that they saw themselves as morally superior; it was their role to elevate the dissolute members of society. Emily Dobson saw herself as the champion of the National Council. She attended every convention of the ICW when she could have sent a proxy; she held meetings at her house when the NCWT could have used the alternative premises such as the Mayor's rooms which were sometimes employed or Lyceum club rooms later used. Emily Dobson enjoyed dominating the National Council and through the Council she influenced the philanthropic activities of Hobart women. But whether Emily Dobson saw herself in this light is doubtful. She would have felt superior to the working class, morally, economically, intellectually and probably religiously although religion was not discussed by the NCWT. Emily Dobson and the National Council certainly felt that it was their duty to help people unable to help themselves; whether they asked for or wanted this help was never considered.

The benefits of the NCWT for the Tasmanian community are not obvious. It is not possible to assess its work in this early period and see solid evidence of its endeavours but this does not mean that the NCWT did not benefit NCW members, affiliated societies, the general public and perhaps people in need. All Tasmanian women benefited from the National Council if only from the fact that it was a publicly visible, formidable organisation of women and the only internationally connected forum of women in Tasmania. The Council's existence helped to promote and encourage women to work in the public sphere, to travel to conferences and to begin to question the male-controlled system. It was by working in the National Council that women gained the experience to be taken seriously in the world of men. Examples of this are Emily Dobson being appointed by Prime Minister Deakin to represent Australia at an International Suffrage Convention or Edith Waterworth, who would become prominent in later years, being appointed to the Tasmanian State Censorship Board or running as a candidate for parliament.

The benefit to affiliated societies was not always easily seen either and the fact that some societies disaffiliated seems to indicate that they too saw little benefit. The National Council provided a forum for the philanthropic community. It linked together a wide range of organisations and allowed them opportunity to discuss their efforts and at times assist each other in common goals. There is more evidence of this in later years as can be seen in the coalition of women's societies that formed the Federation of Women's Societies for Film Censorship and successfully campaigned for film censorship in Tasmania.

The benefit of the NCWT to the public was through the awareness it created on issues which impacted on women and children. The NCWT's opinions were not always welcomed and well received but the Council engendered debate on a wide variety of issues. The National Council was the most reported and discussed organisation in this period. It was welcomed by all Tasmanian newspapers, excepting the *Clipper*, and its meetings and schemes for work were praised. The public was not obviously helped in practical ways but it can be suggested that they benefited from exposure to the Council.

It seems that the one area of society that did not benefit from the National Council were those people in need. There are few examples of the NCWT trying to help those in need

and the examples of it making efforts in areas involving what it saw as 'needy' people, were systematically rejected by those people it was trying to help. The prime example of this was the curfew bell, where it tried to impose a curfew on the children of the working classes, out in the streets late at night. This was not desired or welcomed and received little support from those it aimed to regulate. Before the National Council was established Emily Dobson and other women worked in the Women's Sanitary Association, in a soup kitchen and in housing for the poor; these activities were designed to actually help people in need. The National Council did very little work in this regard. The training of domestic servants would have helped some working class girls find employment, but this was designed to meet the needs of upper-class women not those of needy people.

None of the NCWT activities between 1899 and 1914 met with success. The domestic servant question preoccupied the Council for this entire period and by 1914 there were no schools for the training of domestic servants in Tasmania. The Education Department established cookery classes, not to train servants but to give all girls a well-rounded education and this was not in collaboration or consultation with the National Council. The curfew bell similarly occupied the Council for a number of years with no success. The concept began to elicit some community discussion until Emily Dobson's foolish comments, designed to create fear, resulted in a backlash of comments that silenced the debate on the issue. In other areas of NCWT interest such as library schemes, fevers or tuberculosis, nothing was attempted apart from discussion. It is impossible to show success when all that was attempted was a series of lectures on a topic.

The commencement of the First World War was hardly conducive for the National Council to start to show achievements but it would allow them to branch into areas previously not considered in National Council work.

## PART II

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF TASMANIA

1914 – 1920

## CHAPTER FOUR – THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND EMILY DOBSON

As of 5 August 1914 Australia was at war. This was determined by association with the British Empire, and although the amount of support given to Britain was decided federally, there was never any doubt that Australia would assist the 'mother country'.<sup>1</sup> As 96 per cent of people living in Australia described themselves as British in the 1911 census, this was not surprising.<sup>2</sup> Men rushed to enlist and the first 20,000 places were quickly filled.<sup>3</sup> By 22 August, 2000 Tasmanian men had volunteered to fight in the war<sup>4</sup> and the first Tasmanian troops departed for war in October 1914 in the midst of the crowded Hobart wharves and verses of 'Rule Britannia'.<sup>5</sup>

Women were drawn into the excitement of the war; some women tried to enlist for active service but were refused. They did enlist as nurses and some went to help in the war at their own expense.<sup>6</sup> Women also supported the war from home; war aid activities began in Tasmania almost immediately. Reports of women making 'comforts and necessities' to send abroad for the war effort began to appear in the local papers. Many Tasmanian women continued working for the war effort until after 1918, primarily under the auspices of the Red Cross which was the principal war time aid organisation.

The First World War had a noticeable effect on Tasmanian society. The strong sense of Australian nationalism that was born out of Gallipoli was 'especially noteworthy in Tasmania, a colony which had been untouched by the bush tradition and nationalism of the nineties and left unmoved by federation.'<sup>7</sup> Tasmanians were said to feel a part of Australia for the first time since federation; they had contributed to the security of the

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<sup>1</sup> S. Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia: Volume 4, The Succeeding Age 1901-1942* (Melbourne, 1997) p. 142

<sup>2</sup> L. L. Robson, *Australia and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Melbourne, 1969) p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia*, p. 143

<sup>4</sup> M. Lake, 'Tasmania and the First World War', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1972, p. 12

<sup>5</sup> M. Lake, *A Divided Society: Tasmania During World War I* (Melbourne, 1975) p. 9

<sup>6</sup> P. Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War* (Melbourne, 1984) p. 17 and A. Alexander, *A Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001) p. 100

<sup>7</sup> Lake, *A Divided Society*, p. 192



empire and had had their 'baptism of fire' in the battle fields. Major-General Sir John Gellibrand commented that, 'the most important factor of gain from the war was the national welding together of the various groups of the community, regardless of creed, occupation or birthplace, due to the universal devotion to the common cause.'<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Lake suggested that the opposite of this was the case in Tasmania. She says that the war had a fragmenting effect on society, 'men did not draw nearer to one another, but rather stood further apart.'<sup>9</sup> This view is supported by examining the programme of the National Council of Women during this period. Although it was not overt, the Council's discussions of German goods and the conscription question did more to divide society than to unite it. The changes in society affected men more dramatically than women, but through their men, women also experienced change.<sup>10</sup>

As early as October 1914 there were calls for women to support the war by sending their men:

Women can set the example of holding nothing back. Australians have said they will give their last man and their last shilling; the women in the war must hold nothing back. It is easy to give the last shilling; it is hard to give the only or the last son .... They were given to the mother, and she in turn must give them to the country in time of adversity.<sup>11</sup>

The conscription issue was an important factor in wartime Australia. The nation voted in the two separate referenda of 1916 and 1917 not to institute conscription but in the contemporary newspapers it was unusual to read an editorial or letter not in favour of conscription in Tasmania. A woman's very femininity was said to be at stake if she did not have a man at the war front.<sup>12</sup> A woman writing to the editor of the *Brisbane Courier* noted in 1916 that 'any right-minded woman would rather be the mother or sister of a

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<sup>8</sup> Lake, *A Divided Society*, p. 189

<sup>9</sup> Lake, *A Divided Society*, p. 189

<sup>10</sup> J. Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes involving Australian Women since 1880* (Melbourne, 1990), p. 132

<sup>11</sup> *Mercury* 17 October 1914, p. 11

<sup>12</sup> C. Shute, 'Heroines and heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914 -18', in J. Damousi, M. Lake (eds), *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century* (Cambridge, 1995) p. 25

dead hero than a living shirker'.<sup>13</sup> As early as 1915 there were calls in the *Mercury* to women to begin to hand out white feathers.<sup>14</sup> Women in Britain had begun the practice of handing a white feather to men of eligible service age who had not signed up. This act was to shame men avoiding enlistment and was a way of calling them cowards. A White Feather League was established in Hobart<sup>15</sup> but the practice of handing out white feathers was short lived as letters to the newspapers poured in telling stories of men who had been embarrassed publicly by being handed a white feather when they were either medically unfit, or a returned wounded soldier.<sup>16</sup>

There is some indication that Australian National Councils were pro-conscription, and although there is no direct evidence that the Tasmania Council shared this view, it does seem likely this was the case. Some individual NCWT members were definitely pro-conscription. The NCW of Victoria was initially a pacifist organisation but this changed during the war. The NCWV resolved in 1917 to discourage girls from playing tennis or any other kind of sport with men eligible for service who had not signed up.<sup>17</sup> The NCWV adopted traditional feminine jobs, providing food and clothes for soldiers and generally assuming a passive and supportive role.<sup>18</sup> The NCW WA adopted similar activities after 1914 and became involved in sock knitting and Red Cross works.<sup>19</sup> After the war it appears that the Australian National Councils continued their pre-war activities, as was the case in Tasmania.

This wartime change to pro-conscription was relatively common. Most women's organisations from 1914 until 1918 became involved in the war effort. They joined the Red Cross and knitted socks and underwear for the soldiers, as any good mother, sister or wife would have done. The NCWV resolving to discourage girls from socialising with

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<sup>13</sup> Shute, 'Heroines and heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914 -18', p. 25

<sup>14</sup> Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p. 84

<sup>15</sup> Lake, 'Tasmania and the First World War', p. 52

<sup>16</sup> *Mercury* 15 May 1915, p. 10; 21 May 1915, p. 8; 29 May 1915, p. 7 and Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, pp. 92-93

<sup>17</sup> A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood, 1994) p. 428

<sup>18</sup> J. Damousi, 'Marching to Different Drums', p. 355

<sup>19</sup> K. White, 'Bessie Rischbieth, Jessie Street and the end of first-wave feminism in Australia' in M. Bevege (ed.), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia* (Sydney, 1982) p. 320

eligible men who would not enlist, claimed by Anne Summers, is not in the official history of the NCWV written in 1946, nor is it recorded in other histories of the Victorian Council.<sup>20</sup> It is also difficult to compare this trend in other commonwealth countries as the history of the National Council of Women of Canada<sup>21</sup> does not mention the war years at all and the centennial history of the New Zealand NCW is similarly vague as between 1906 and 1918 its Council disbanded.<sup>22</sup> Histories written of Australian conscription during the First World War do not mention the NCW although the WCTU, Women's Peace Association and other such organisation are recorded in the fight against conscription.<sup>23</sup> It is likely that the National Councils of Australia, like those organisations affiliated with them, were interested in peace and arbitration but during the war years thought that (as the New Zealand Prime Minister phrased it), '[Conscription] was a choice between British rule or German rule'.<sup>24</sup>

The pro-conscription position was not simple and not necessarily anti-peace. It was believed that the men already at the front needed reinforcement and that it would be possible to end the war earlier and with less cost in lives with more men fighting. Able men who refused to enlist while their brothers died on the front lines were seen as cowards. People were urged to vote 'yes' for conscription, for to do otherwise would have been selfish.<sup>25</sup>

Tasmania was largely pro-conscription, recording a 'yes' majority in both conscription referenda, but as only Tasmania and Western Australia did this, conscription was not adopted. The state held some anti-conscription meetings. One very large meeting was reported in October 1916 and not a single National Council member was listed as present.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after this meeting the *Mercury* ran a large pro-conscription edition

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<sup>20</sup> H. Gillan, *A Brief History of the National Council of Women of Victoria 1902-1945* (Melbourne, 1946); A. Norris, *Champions of the Impossible: A History of the National Council of Women of Victoria 1902-1977* (Melbourne, 1978); Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, p. 428

<sup>21</sup> R.L. Shaw, *Proud Heritage: A History of the National Council of Women of Canada* (Toronto, 1957)

<sup>22</sup> D. Page, *The National Council of Women: A Centennial History* (Auckland, 1996) p. 38

<sup>23</sup> J. Barrett, *Falling in: Australia and 'Boy Conscription' 1911-1915* (Sydney, 1979) and L.C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia* (London, 1935)

<sup>24</sup> Page, *The National Council of Women*, p. 52

<sup>25</sup> *Mercury* 25 October 1916, pp. 8-9

<sup>26</sup> *Mercury* 7 October 1916, p. 5

where it printed the views of supporters. Sarah Hannaford of the NCWT was reported to list her three reasons for voting for conscription as, '1) In the cause of common humanity; 2) We cannot pray for righteous peace without doing our utmost to advance it, for that were mockery; 3) That in the hour of victory our favoured land may not be rightly branded "murderer and traitor".'<sup>27</sup> Although this evidence is not adequate to conclusively claim that the NCWT was pro-conscription, it is likely that many members were.

The NCWT produced more tangible work during the years of the First World War than it did during its formative years. It was not successful in all it undertook but it did make some significant achievements. Similarly, Emily Dobson also became interested in new areas during these years.

### **Emily Dobson**

During the First World War Emily Dobson was involved in some activities separate from the National Council, although it still held much of her attention. In January 1914 she was appointed Australian delegate to represent the Australian Councils at a meeting of the ICW in Scandinavia. She was also appointed delegate to the quinquennial congress in Rome to be held in June that same year.<sup>28</sup> While she was in Rome she was elected ICW vice-president. This was a remarkable achievement for Emily Dobson, Tasmania and Australia; of all Australian women in 1914 involved with the National Council Emily Dobson was presumably the most experienced candidate. While Emily Dobson was away in Rome war broke out and she was unable to return home until April 1915. During this time she lived with her daughter Claire Tyser in Kent, and worked with the National Council of Women of England. Emily Dobson wrote in February 1915 with instructions: 'will you tell the National Council that our work cannot go on while the war lasts, except by work for the soldiers and sailors. We are working hard here.'<sup>29</sup> It is unknown if the Tasmanian Council agreed with these instructions. The Council did not undertake any work to benefit soldiers or sailors.

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<sup>27</sup> *Mercury* 25 October 1916, p. 9

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Post* 14 January 1914, p. 3

<sup>29</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 25 February 1915, p. 9

After Emily Dobson returned to Tasmania she maintained her interests in domestic training but this took a secondary place in the agenda of the NCWT. Through her role as Commissioner of the Girl Guides, she was able to teach girls some of the cookery skills she believed to be so important. In 1916 Emily Dobson started a series of cookery demonstrations for the Girl Guides who reportedly enjoyed the lessons for 'cookery does appeal to normal girls'. She actually taught these classes herself and apparently demonstrated in 'faultless style beef olives, poached eggs, Tasmanian pudding,<sup>30</sup> fish rissoles and baked cheese with macaroni.'<sup>31</sup> In 1919 Emily Dobson was again reported as teaching her girl guides to cook, this time at a 'camp out' at Browns River, Kingston where she taught them the 'science of cooking'.<sup>32</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter Emily Dobson was very interested in establishing some form of cookery education for young girls and in training domestic servants. As commissioner of the Girl Guides, Emily Dobson had a captive audience and resorted to teaching the girls cookery herself. But her recognition of the importance of basic cookery skills was not unique. Louisa Macdonald was the head of the Women's College at the University of Sydney in 1892. She had grown up with servants and did not know how to cook. Once in Australia, with its lack of servants she discovered that educated young women needed to know how to cook. She established a cookery course at the Women's College and herself enrolled.<sup>33</sup> It might be the case that Emily Dobson understood this need for 'the new woman' to be able to cook for herself. Training Girl Guides to cook would not have satisfied her desire for well trained domestic servants, and as the Girl Guides were generally not of the working class these skills were presumably to assist them in later life.

Personally the war years were difficult for Emily Dobson. Henry Dobson died on 10 October 1918 aged seventy-seven years. She was seventy-six and lived with her youngest daughter Marguerite until her death, sixteen years later. Henry Dobson had been in 'indifferent health for a considerable time, mainly due to an infection of the heart. During the last week or two [of his life] he had been confined to his bed ... he gradually

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<sup>30</sup> This was apparently an 'appetising sweet dish that was formally known by the name now taboo'; presumably it was a German named dish.

<sup>31</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 28 June 1916, p. 9

<sup>32</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 1 May 1919, p. 9

<sup>33</sup> S. De Vries, *Strength of Purpose* (Sydney, 1998) p. 18



Emily Dobson as Girl Guide Commissioner

*Tasmanian Mail* 2 March 1922, p. 11

sank and passed peacefully away.’<sup>34</sup> Presumably Emily Dobson had been restricted in her activities while her husband was sick. The next month she presided over the National Council meeting but for the first time, when delegates were chosen for the inter-state congress in Victoria, she was not one of them.<sup>35</sup> This is the only time in the twenty year history of the National Council in Tasmania that Emily Dobson did not nominate to attend an inter-state congress and this was probably due to Henry Dobson’s death; she would have been in mourning. At seventy-six Emily Dobson was still a valuable member of the National Council.

In 1919 Emily Dobson was awarded an honour by the National Council for her years of community service. The Emily Dobson Philanthropic Prize was created as a perpetual award for the community organisation doing the best work in Tasmania. The first year’s prize of £5 was ‘donated by a friend of Mrs Dobson’s’<sup>36</sup> but for the prize to become perpetual a larger amount had to be raised. In connection with the organisations in which Emily Dobson was associated Mary Bisdee organised a subscription and raised £100 which was to yield £5 annually. Emily Dobson was presented with a leather bound portfolio with an address which read:

A memento of the Emily Dobson annual philanthropic prize. This fund was inaugurated in 1919 as a slight recognition of the initiation, organisation and untiring work of Mrs Henry Dobson in the cause of philanthropy, of which she has made a noble life-work, culminating in her able presidency for many years of the NCWT, with which council are affiliated thirty-six organisations of women, and men and women. ‘Lives of great men all remind us we may make our lives sublime.’<sup>37</sup>

It was not made clear if this honour was a surprise to Emily Dobson or prepared in consultation with her. In 1920 the Prize was awarded for the first time at the National

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<sup>34</sup> *Mercury* 10 October 1918, p. 5

<sup>35</sup> *Mercury* 19 November 1918, p. 6

<sup>36</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 6 March 1919, p. 9. It was later mentioned that the ‘friend’ was Mrs. Finlaison.

*Tasmanian Mail* 19 February 1920, p. 9

<sup>37</sup> *Mercury* 6 February 1919, p. 8

Council's annual convention. The Council delegates voted for the society that had done the most tangible good for the community during the year; votes were based on the annual reports read at the congress. The prize for 1920 was awarded to the Young Women's Christian Association. It was noted that 'a pleasant feature is that the first society to receive the Emily Dobson Philanthropic Prize is the society of which Miss Marguerite Dobson has been able president for three or four years'.<sup>38</sup> This does not appear to have seemed a strange coincidence to either the Council or the local newspapers. A further coincidence was shown in 1921 when the prize was awarded to the Free Kindergarten Association which was the creation of Henry Dobson and of which Emily Dobson was president.<sup>39</sup> It is perhaps not coincidence then that the Dobson family benefited by proxy through their community organisations. It is also possible that these organisations produced the most tangible good.

In addition to Emily Dobson's private activities she still led the National Council. During the war years there was less evidence to suggest that Emily Dobson dominated and dictated the activities of the National Council as she did between 1899 and 1914. But while there were still examples of her influence in Council projects, there was similarly evidence that her control was lessened. During the First World War Edith Waterworth became prominent in women's activities. Before, it was Emily Dobson dominating the women's organisations and receiving newspaper attention; during the war and inter-war years Edith Waterworth began to influence and lead women's agenda. She was the main protagonist in the campaign for film censorship in Tasmania and in the fight for civic rights for women along with Frances Edwards. In the 1920s Edith Waterworth was in her late forties, while Emily Dobson was in her late seventies. Edith Waterworth's activities were reported in the papers and her initiatives and suggestions were discussed by the community. She provoked a response from the community that only Emily Dobson had been able to do before.

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<sup>38</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 19 February 1920, p. 9

<sup>39</sup> AOT, NS 325/9A and B, Minute Book of the NCWT, 22 April 1921, p. 18



## CHAPTER FIVE – WARTIME WORK

The First World War has historically been given the credit for opening up new opportunities for women in careers and jobs previously unavailable to them. This was certainly the case in Britain. Women moved into factories and held positions usually only held by men; women were asked to ‘do your bit; replace a man for the front’.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Australia, in Britain the First World War had caused a massive unemployment problem for women workers.<sup>2</sup> Working-class women were retrenched from jobs they held before the war that were not essential during wartime. Joining the industrial work force was as much a necessity to live as it was a patriotic duty. In the Tasmanian newspapers women columnists wrote frequently about the advancement of British women into new areas of employment. There were reports that women in England were becoming town councillors, town criers, hairdressers, policewomen, and toymakers.<sup>3</sup> It was reported that the ‘new woman’ was on the rise. The old world of pre-1914 was said to have died and the new world, with new dreams and aims had begun with the war.<sup>4</sup> The extent to which this happened in Tasmania is problematical. Tasmanian women were not called into the factories as British women were and working class women did not have their pre-war jobs disturbed to a great extent. Women were asked to help with the war effort but only in relation to fund raising, knitting socks and helping all men to serve in the war by voting pro-conscription. Some attempts were made by the National Council to move women into new areas of work, such as into agriculture or police work, but these were met with limited success.

### Agriculture

During the First World War there were efforts to encourage women to work in agriculture to release men for war service and to fill an ever-increasing need for produce. Studying women in agriculture is not an easy task. Any accounts of women on the land are vague and histories of men in agriculture do not emphasise the significance of women’s contributions generally and less so during the war years. Even official statistics are

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<sup>1</sup> D. Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War One* (London, 1998) p. 144

<sup>2</sup> Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 144

<sup>3</sup> *Mercury* 2 January 1915, p. 10; *Mercury* 1915, *passim*

<sup>4</sup> *Mercury* 8 January 1916, p. 10

inaccurate for they fail to adequately record women's efforts.<sup>5</sup> The reports of the National Council's efforts to support women working on the land came from contemporary newspapers, particularly the *Mercury*, as its women's columnist Clio was in favour of the scheme.

The concept of encouraging women into agriculture during the war years was not unique to the NCWT. It became interested in women working on the land after a paper was presented at its annual convention in January 1914 by the delegate from the National Council of Victoria. The concept was discussed as an ideal career for women: 'the more delicate operations of horticulture were those in which woman, with her delicacy of touch, would excel. The gathering, selecting and packing of fruit were branches of horticulture suitable to women'.<sup>6</sup> The delegate from Sydney expressed her Council's wish to do more work in this area as they were currently trying to establish a horticultural college for women. This idea was warmly received by Clio and she encouraged the National Council in this work in her column throughout the war years. In 1915 she reported that on mainland Australia women were, for the first time, applying to be admitted into agricultural colleges and that Dookie Agricultural College would be accepting applications from women. The first woman student was Irene Lowe, a mainland woman who was reported to be doing well.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of training women to work in agriculture increased as the war became more protracted. The First World War was on a scale never seen before in the modern world and its duration was unexpected. The needs of both agriculture and sending more able bodied men abroad were in conflict, and employing women to work on the land seemed to answer this problem. Again in 1916 Clio called for action to be taken in this area:

We are told we must increase our primary products, and if we are to do so to any extent women must take their share in coaxing Mother Earth to yield up her

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<sup>5</sup> M. Alston, *Women on the Land: The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia* (Kensington, 1995) p. 29

<sup>6</sup> *Mercury* 15 January 1914, p. 6

<sup>7</sup> *Mercury* 17 April 1915, p. 10; 26 June 1915, p. 11

vegetable treasures .... There is just a hope that something may be done in this matter now that the war has claimed so many men and women are wanted to fill their places.<sup>8</sup>

The National Council was addressed again on this subject in 1917 by Frederick Burbury MHA, pastoralist from Oatlands.<sup>9</sup> The National Council was in favour of the concept, but recognised the need for training if women were going to be successful. The women present decided to apply to government for advice and assistance.<sup>10</sup> This move did not attract support. Clio wrote about the decision despairingly the following week:

Training women to work upon the land was discussed [at the NCWT meeting], and alas! with the same disappointing results as usual that the government shall be applied to in the matter. Why not, oh women, bring this matter to a practical head? ... if there are young women and girls in Hobart who are desirous of learning agriculture and horticulture, why not get them together, and see how many there are who are out for real work, not publicity and photographs ... a training school could be started next week ... while the passing of resolutions as to government training may be an agreeable amusement at National Councils of Women far on in the centuries.<sup>11</sup>

These scathing comments were made by the National Council's biggest supporter in the press. The NCWT's *modus operandi* in dealing with new lines of interest was wearing thin with its 'friends'. Clio was correct in her comments; it was usual for the National Council to 'over-think' its endeavours and become so caught up in bureaucratic red tape that nothing was achieved. At this point the National Council could have held a meeting of women interested in working on the land – it seems the logical first step to find out the community interest in the scheme – but instead the Council chose to consult the government, men with vested interests. Thus the decision was made in March but it was not until May that Emily Dobson led a deputation to the Minister for Lands, J. B Hayes.

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<sup>8</sup> *Mercury* 20 May 1916, p. 10; 15 July 1916, p. 10

<sup>9</sup> S and B Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* (Canberra, 1980) p. 24

<sup>10</sup> *Mercury* 21 March 1917, p. 6

<sup>11</sup> *Mercury* 24 March 1917, p. 10

In the time between the initial decision and the deputation, there were moves to establish a women's hostel for war food preparation in Hobart. Clio reported she had received a letter from Mrs Masterman of Bagdad who was skilled in agriculture and was willing to manage such a hostel if the land was provided. There is no evidence to suggest that the National Council was involved with this new development, but Clio gave it the credit, writing that, 'the National Council of Women are to be congratulated on being able to start with a really practical teacher'.<sup>12</sup> As the NCWT's deputation to the Minister took place Clio was able to report that the women's hostel was ready and only in need of 'six merry maidens to take up the shovel and the hoe'.<sup>13</sup>

The NCWT's deputation to the Minister for Lands was 'very courteously received'. It was reported that he thought that lectures on agriculture might be possible but he was unable to commit money for training.<sup>14</sup> In June 1917 members of the public interested in women's work in agriculture were invited by Emily Dobson and the NCWT to hear how far the committee had gone with its proposals. The National Council proposed to start a cookery school to make women wanting to go onto the land more useful to farming households. This was a return to Emily Dobson's preoccupation with cookery classes for girls and was inappropriate at this time. The Council's first aim should have been encouraging women farming, not cooking for farmers. The NCWT thought women could be paid with room and board in exchange for working on farms until they became proficient enough to warrant a salary. The Council assumed that, 'If women could not defend their country in the battlefield, they could and must take their share of the crushing burden of the world's need, by providing the necessities of life.'<sup>15</sup> Classes were scheduled to begin at the technical school the next week.

The lecture series given under the auspices of the National Council began but it was seen by those dedicated to getting women onto the land as being too little. 'No doubt they [the

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<sup>12</sup> *Mercury* 14 April 1917, p. 10

<sup>13</sup> *Mercury* 5 May 1917, p. 10

<sup>14</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 3 May 1917, p. 9

<sup>15</sup> *Mercury* 9 June 1917, p. 5

lectures] will be practical and useful but it seems a thousand pities they should be given before hearers are able to apply them to an acre ... of their own soil, their own trees, their own plants, and their own grubs and pests.’<sup>16</sup> The *Daily Post* suggested that if the National Council were committed to helping in rural areas they should organise a band to send assistance to farmers’ wives for the duration of their confinements.<sup>17</sup> This was not taken up by the National Council. Instead the lecture series continued, although in July it was reported to be waning and the Acting Director of Agriculture, L. A Evans noted that he would like to see the lectures better patronised by the public.<sup>18</sup> This lack of support was also noticeable in the newspapers where a few letters appeared against women going on to the land, stating that women’s place was in the home and it was deplorable to see women in leggings without skirts, ‘indeed, what are our men to do if this craze of women on the land continues?’<sup>19</sup> A female correspondent made these comments.

The efforts to encourage women to work in agriculture began to decline in late 1917 and, although Clio encouraged the movement, the National Council recognised that it had limited support. In her annual report, the NCWT secretary blamed the government’s indecision in the matter of conscription for the lack of progress in putting women on the land. Conscription would have led to labour shortages on farms and women would have been needed to take up the positions of the men, and women on the land would become a reality. However, for the second time Australia voted against conscription in the referendum and the NCWT decided that the women in agriculture movement ‘lacked public interest and sympathy’.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1918 Irene Lowe became the first woman to attain a Bachelor of Agriculture from Dookie College; but in January 1919 Clio wrote her last column on women in agriculture, which she saw as being more important than ever with the high price of produce. ‘We have had a good deal of talk and a number of elaborate plans and addresses from experts, but the practical step of renting an acre of land and preparing it and sowing

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<sup>16</sup> *Mercury* 9 June 1917, p. 10

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Post* 22 June 1917, p. 2

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Post* 18 July 1917, p. 7

<sup>19</sup> *Mercury* 23 July 1917, p. 10

<sup>20</sup> *Mercury* 27 February 1918, p. 7

it is always shied away from.<sup>21</sup> The idea of getting women to work on the land was not originally the idea of the NCWT but it took the scheme on and investigated its possibilities. Perhaps if the Council had been more inclined to initiate practical farming then community interest may have been stronger, once actual results could have been appreciated. But the NCWT erred on the side of caution and chose not to attempt a project on a large scale without the support of the government and without educating women as to the fundamentals of farming. This project was reminiscent of the Southport settlement of the 1890s (discussed in chapter one) where the project was begun but fell through for various reasons but partly because there was not enough support. Perhaps Emily Dobson was not prepared to make the same mistake again? The Council became caught up in the red tape of government bureaucracy and nothing was achieved. As a result of this the Council lost the support of its primary enthusiast. Clio thought caution was not necessary and advocated prompt and practical farming. In the case of Mrs Masterman who offered to train women on the land in a community farm, whom Clio praised and supported, nothing more was said. Because of Clio's interest in the scheme it is unlikely that it was successful as she would have reported this in her column.

### **Register for war work**

In 1915 the NCWT resolved to open an employment register of women and girls who were willing to be called up for temporary wartime employment and allow men leave to enlist. It was reported that some women had already given their names and notified the Council of the various jobs they would be willing to undertake.<sup>22</sup> This type of register had been used by National Councils in other states and was essentially a mainland idea but without the introduction of conscription, forcing men to leave their jobs, there was not the imperative for women to join the work force. It was reported in 1917 that although the women's work register had been instituted and sanctioned by the government, farmers did not avail themselves of women's offers to work. This however was reminiscent of the desire to train women in agriculture and similarly was not ultimately successful. Perhaps the community lacked faith in the Council to bring a plan

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<sup>21</sup> *Mercury* 25 January 1919, p. 10

<sup>22</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 19 August 1915, p. 9

to fruition. It was not necessary to have Australian women work for the war as British and allied women did. The desire to help in this regard does show the National Council's willingness to assist in the war effort, even if the members were not offering themselves as the new labour force.

### **Policewomen**

By 1914 reports of the appointment and work of policewomen in Britain and the mainland were becoming more frequent in the women's sections of Tasmanian newspapers. The position of a policewoman in London was said to be a job which required, 'tact, judgement, courage, insight in human nature, and the faculty of thinking and acting quickly more than any physical attributes'.<sup>23</sup> Women in London were employed in patrolling the streets, attending court hearings, paying home visits and supervising any areas where young people congregated. In New South Wales and Victoria the National Councils were asked to recommend suitable candidates for policewomen.<sup>24</sup> Kate Cocks was the first Australian policewoman, appointed in South Australia in 1915. She is said to have been the first 'genuine' policewoman in the British Empire as she was given the same powers of arrest as male officers.<sup>25</sup>

In Tasmania it is likely that the desire for women police grew from a wish to retain the woman health inspector. In February 1915 a meeting was called by the Women's Sanitary Association, an affiliate of the NCWT, to discuss the proposal of the City Council to remove women health inspectors from active duty. The Association was adamant that there should be at least one woman health inspector because there were certain questions that only a woman could ask. It was argued that while a male inspector was escorted around the factories, he rarely spoke to the women workers.<sup>26</sup> A deputation of 'practically every women's society in Hobart'<sup>27</sup> waited upon the mayor and aldermen. Alicia O'Shea-Petersen was reported as saying to the mayor:

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<sup>23</sup> *Mercury* 8 January 1916, p. 10

<sup>24</sup> *Mercury* 19 August 1916, p. 10 and 28 October 1916, p. 10

<sup>25</sup> T. Prenzler, 'Women in Australian Policing: An Historical Overview', *Journal of Australian Studies* 42, September 1994, p. 79

<sup>26</sup> M. McFeely, *Lady Inspectors: The campaign for a better work place 1893-1921* (Oxford, 1988) p. 4

<sup>27</sup> *Examiner* 23 February 1915, p. 6

We are coming again later on the question of a full time health officer. If you do not consider our request favourably we will make you (laughter). I will take the position of lady inspector myself, and I am qualified, free of cost to you, for six months, until you get the position filled; I am that keen on it.<sup>28</sup>

This offer was not taken up by the mayor but shows how passionately she felt about the need for women inspectors.

The NCWT discussed the appointment of women patrols at its annual congress in 1917. Emily Dobson spoke on the need for policewomen who would provide better supervision; she cited young girls wearing short dresses as a concern. Alicia O'Shea-Petersen spoke on the need to enforce correct swimming attire at beaches; 'they were supposed to wear neck-to-knee costumes, yet how often they disregard this rule. It was not uncommon to see girls running along the beaches in company with young men practically nude'.<sup>29</sup> This does seem to show a naivety and a lack of serious concern by the National Council but a deputation waited on the attorney-general to ask for the appointment of either women patrols or policewomen on the same lines as those selected in other states. The NCWT wanted policewomen to 'look after silly, and often innocent girls, in order to save them from absolute rotters of men.'<sup>30</sup> By November 1917 a policewoman had been appointed in Tasmania. In the Annual Report of the Police Department the Acting-Commissioner, Mr Andrewartha reported that:

Enquires are proceeding for the class of applicant desired by the Department, and as soon as a few can be found who in points of character, physique, and education satisfy requirements, and who many be relied on to act with firmness and courage, and the appointments will be recommended.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Examiner* 23 February 1915, p. 6 It is unknown which organization Alicia O'Shea-Petersen was a delegate from.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Post* 22 March 1917, p. 3

<sup>30</sup> *Daily Post* 22 March 1917, p. 3

<sup>31</sup> Parliament of Tasmania, Police Department: Report for 1916-1917, No. 34, p. 8



Kate Campbell was appointed the state's first policewoman in 1917 until Maud Cross and Maud Hughes replaced her the following year, one in Launceston and one in Hobart.<sup>32</sup> In 1918 the Council was informed that no woman over thirty-five years of age would be considered for the position of policewoman; the Council hoped that this limitation might soon be removed. The move of women into police work appears to have been smooth.<sup>33</sup> Some members of the community praised the work of the policewomen:

The lady-police in this city have already proved that they are endowed with finer brains and intelligence in dealing with and preventing crime than are the majority of their brother officers ... in six months their kindly, judicious advice has worked more good in this respect than all the sledge-hammer bullying bluster of male officers. Keep up the good work ladies! Parents appreciate you!<sup>34</sup>

Their job was to supervise children and help women rather than active criminal investigations. They called attention to children not attending school and located and assisted women in the city without a home, money or friends. The policewomen escorted female prisoners and assisted in the suppression of fortunetelling. They worked to enforce various laws that protected women and children including: The Infant Life Protection Act, Destitute and Neglected Children Act and Offences Against the Person Act.<sup>35</sup> It seems that policewomen fulfilled a more significant role than the National Council had envisaged.

### **Women's Active War Work**

During the war years the Council showed minor interest in contagious diseases, particularly venereal disease but its work to help in the regard was negligible, although Edith Waterworth noted 'how marvellously public opinion has been roused during the last few years on this subject'.<sup>36</sup> The Council also briefly discussed a boycott of German made goods but this similarly did not amount to any tangible results. Some women did

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<sup>32</sup> G. Easton, *Tasmania Police from Force to Service, 1803-1999* (Hobart, 1999) p. 40

<sup>33</sup> Parliament of Tasmania, Police Department: Report for 1916-1917, No. 34, p. 8; 1917-1918, No. 47, p. 8 and 1918-1919, No. 29, p. 7

<sup>34</sup> *Mercury* 1 May 1918, p. 3

<sup>35</sup> Easton, *Tasmania Police*, p. 40

<sup>36</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT) Non-State (NS) 4/1, Newspaper Clippings of Hypatia, 1916

however contribute to the war effort in more practical ways than the National Council. Some women enlisted as nurses while other women supported the war through Red Cross work. Many National Council women were involved in various branches of the Red Cross but the organisation did not affiliate with the Council nor did they collaborate on any endeavours.

## Nurses

The first Australian Army Nursing Service was founded in New South Wales in 1899 and in 1902, after Federation the service became a nationwide organisation.<sup>37</sup> Between 1914 and 1918 3,000 Australian Nurses served overseas in 'Egypt, Palestine, the Persian Gulf, England, France, Italy, Burma, India, Vladivostok, Abyssinia and on hospital ships and transports.'<sup>38</sup> The first group of AANS to be sent to the First World War sailed with a troopship that left Melbourne 20 October 1914, which was only two months after the outbreak of the war.<sup>39</sup> Although this was the first official group to be sent to the war, it was not uncommon for women and men to go at their own expense to bring back wounded. The first seven Australian nurses to serve overseas in the First World War did not belong to the AANS or any other official organisation.<sup>40</sup> This was also the case in the South African War; the Tasmanian Government did not send any Tasmanian women to the war as nurses despite expressions of interest. New South Wales was the only colony to pay fares and salaries of nurses who sailed with the second contingent of the NSW Army Medical Corps which sailed for the South African War in January 1900.<sup>41</sup>

There were eighty-nine Tasmanian women recorded as nurses in the First World War, but there has not been any extensive research into the lives of these women.<sup>42</sup> Broinowski claimed in *Tasmanian's War Record* in 1921, that the nurses in the First World War were

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<sup>37</sup> R. Goodman, *Our War Nurses: The History of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps 1902-1988* (Brisbane, 1988) p. 2

<sup>38</sup> P. Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War* (Melbourne, 1984) p. 16

<sup>39</sup> Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p. 17

<sup>40</sup> J. Bassett, *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War*. (Melbourne, 1992) p. 32

<sup>41</sup> W. Rimon, 'Tasmanian Women and the Boer War', Unpublished BA Hons Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002, pp. 21-22

<sup>42</sup> L. Broinowski, *Tasmania's War Record 1914-1918* (Hobart, 1921) p. 179

simply too busy to keep diaries or memoirs and that they emerged from the war with only a vague idea of anything beyond their personal experiences.<sup>43</sup> Most nurses in the First World War endured similar conditions and these were of a poor standard. One report from an Australian nurse at a Belgian Field Hospital was published in the *Mercury* in 1916:

We are a very motley crew. All meet at meals, which are taken in rather a scramble ... we all sleep in a large dormitory – in cubicles, men on one side and women on the other. At times it is rather convenient. For instance the other night we were shelled by the Germans ... so we were able to consult the men on the subject without getting out of bed. It was an awful feeling not knowing whether our place would be struck or not.<sup>44</sup>

Australian nurses were the only women allowed on active service; others were confined to patriotic work at home, knitting socks and fundraising.<sup>45</sup> Women enlisted in the war for the same reasons as men, 'Patriotism and a duty to England and the Empire, mixed with a strong sense of Adventure.'<sup>46</sup> Women's involvement as nurses in the war was not a continuation of the first wave feminist ideals of the years before the war. Women's desire to assist in the war was not about equal rights with men, but a desire to share in the struggle to keep Australia free.<sup>47</sup> In 1919 Australian nurse Matron Elsie Gray said, 'should no further work be found for us in England we will return to our own land feeling glad that we have been permitted to stand by the side of our soldiers and proud to have had a share in the great struggle for freedom and right.'<sup>48</sup>

## Red Cross

The Red Cross was founded by a Swiss, Henri Dunant, around 1859. Before the Red Cross was established, wounded were tended by camp followers and prisoners of war had

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<sup>43</sup> Broinowski, *Tasmania's War Record*, p. 179

<sup>44</sup> *Mercury* 16 January 1915, p. 10

<sup>45</sup> M. Barker, *Nightingales in the Mud: The Digger Sisters of the Great War, 1914-1918* (Sydney, 1989) p.2

<sup>46</sup> Barker, *Nightingales in the Mud*, p. 2

<sup>47</sup> Barker, *Nightingales in the Mud*, p. 117

<sup>48</sup> Barker, *Nightingales in the Mud*, p. 117

no protection, no access to supplies and their families had no means of finding out their situation. In 1901 Dunant was awarded the first Nobel peace prize for his work.<sup>49</sup> The first Australian Red Cross branch was formed in NSW before the First World War under the patronage of Lady Helen Munro-Ferguson, who was the wife of the Governor-General and had worked with the Red Cross in England.<sup>50</sup> When the war broke out the Australian government saw little need for voluntary organisations such as the Red Cross and their work was not encouraged. It was not until 1915 when some of the wounded Gallipoli soldiers returned home and there was no organisation prepared to take these men and supply food, money or transport that the Australian government saw the need. By 1916 the Red Cross started to receive praise in the daily papers for its efforts with the wounded soldiers.<sup>51</sup>

In August 1914 Lady Helen appealed to Australian women to support the Red Cross. On 14 August Hobart women met in the Town Hall to consider how best to help in the war effort.<sup>52</sup> They agreed to co-operate with the St John's Ambulance Association and form work parties to make garments to send to the front. The efforts of the Tasmanian Red Cross received praise from the newspapers as early as August 1914. It was reported that another huge consignment of 'comforts and necessities' was ready to leave Hobart for the troops. It was added that, 'wherever British women are, they are working for the men in the fighting lines happily, under the splendid organisation of the Red Cross, with a feeling that their efforts will not be wasted, but the men will receive the benefit of their efforts.'<sup>53</sup> As mentioned above the National Council was not officially involved in the Red Cross as part of its programme of activities for the war years, but this did not stop individual members taking an active role in the work. Mary Parker of the National Council was awarded an OBE for her services to the Red Cross,<sup>54</sup> and Mrs Hubbard, also a National Council member, worked hard to send supplies to war-stricken Belgian women and children. Mrs Hubbard reported that the Red Cross had made over fifty

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<sup>49</sup> Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p. 37

<sup>50</sup> L. Stubbings, 'Look What You Started Henry': *A History of the Australian Red Cross 1914-1991* (Melbourne, 1992) p. 7

<sup>51</sup> Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p. 38

<sup>52</sup> A. Alexander, *The Eastern Shore: A History of Clarence* (Rosny Park, 2003) p. 133

<sup>53</sup> *Mercury* 17 October 1914, p. 11

<sup>54</sup> Broinowski, *Tasmania's War Record*, p. 186

outfits for children and had sent them with labels saying, 'From Tasmania. For a brave little Belgian.'<sup>55</sup> Red Cross work was of a more practical nature than the National Council's. In chapter ten there are many references to National Council members becoming involved in some area of wartime aid work. Officially the National Council chose to sympathise with the plight of Belgium; in January 1914 it had received an appeal from the European Councils asking all National Councils to do something to alleviate the suffering of the war. The NCWT chose to send a reply, 'sympathising with the women but avoiding any reference to politics'.<sup>56</sup>

Reports on the work of the Red Cross continued in the women's column of the *Mercury* throughout the war years. After Christmas 1914 the column told women that now the Christmas season was over it was time to, 'work, work, work all day and everyday'<sup>57</sup> for the Red Cross effort. In Tasmania Red Cross work took a while to adhere. At first it was unclear what the work entailed, 'with a vague notion that Red Cross work had to do with nursing the wounded, special ambulance classes were started where women of all ages leaned bandaging and other mysteries.'<sup>58</sup> Later word was received that the soldiers were in need of pyjamas and socks, and the Tasmanian Red Cross truly found its niche. Women continued working for the Red Cross throughout the war years and beyond; they collected money, made sandbags for the trenches and practised economy in their homes. There were 190 work circles and branches of the Red Cross established in Tasmania; 110 in the south and 80 in the north.<sup>59</sup> During the war years the Australian Red Cross provided 1,354,324 pairs of socks as well as other necessities.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Mercury* 19 October 1914, p. 3

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Post* 14 January 1914, p. 3

<sup>57</sup> *Mercury* 2 January 1915, p. 10

<sup>58</sup> Broinowski, *Tasmania's War Record*, p. 186

<sup>59</sup> Broinowski, *Tasmania's War Record*, p. 186

<sup>60</sup> Alexander, *A Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001) p. 99

## CHAPTER SIX – RAISING THE MORAL TONE

During the First World War the National Council remained interested in moral standards in society. The NCWT became interested in temperance issues for the first time. Wartime interest in temperance was not unique; in fact it was a common movement in most commonwealth nations. In England in 1915 King George V banned all 'wines, spirits and beers' from the royal household for the duration of the war.<sup>1</sup> He claimed 'the patriotic thing was to keep out of hotels after dinner'.<sup>2</sup> Interest in film censorship was prominent in Tasmania and continued into the 1920s. Before 1914 there were few complaints about picture shows and these were limited to WCTU complaints about picture shows on Sundays. During the war years some Tasmanian women became increasingly intolerant of 'immoral' films shown to mixed audiences of boys and girls. It was believed that some films had the potential to be morally elevating and educational; when correctly used,<sup>3</sup> but for films to work for 'good' rather than 'evil', censorship was important and the NCWT pursued this. The desire for women to have full civic rights under Tasmanian law also became an interest of the National Council in the war years. The battle for civic rights in Tasmania was concerned with women sitting in parliament, appointment of women justices of the peace and equal rights to divorce and child custody.

### Temperance

Any temperance activities of the NCWT during this period were part of a coalition including the WCTU and the male organisations. Their collective concerns were in the compulsory closing of all public houses when transports were in the harbour, enforced six o'clock closing of public houses and an anti-shouting bill. The bill was designed to outlaw the buying of drinks for others. The thought behind this was that while a man might buy himself two drinks, if he were with a group of five and each man was obliged to buy a round then he would have to have five drinks.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Dunstan, *Wowzers* (Melbourne, 1968) p. 109

<sup>2</sup> Dunstan, *Wowzers*, p. 109

<sup>3</sup> S. Petrow, 'Leading Ladies: Women and Film Censorship in Early Twentieth Century Tasmania' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association papers and proceedings* 41, 1994, p. 75

Anti-shouting legislation was first introduced in Western Australia in 1915 under the Prohibition of Treating on Licensed Premises Act. The law stipulated that, 'no person shall ... sell or supply liquor to any person on licensed premises ... unless the liquor is ordered and paid for by the person to whom it is supplied and by whom it is consumed'.<sup>4</sup> In Western Australia the bill passed through the Legislative Council, but was tied in the House of Assembly; it was rejected by the speaker's swaying vote.<sup>5</sup> The Anti-Shouting bill was introduced into Tasmanian parliament in 1916 by Arthur William Loone MLC.<sup>6</sup> The bill received the support of temperance advocates as it had done in Western Australia. In June 1917 the NCWT held a public meeting to 'concentrate efforts in support of anti-shouting, hotel closing during stays of transports, and effective six o'clock closing.'<sup>7</sup> There were thirty women present and it was presided over by Emily Dobson.<sup>8</sup> Sydney Cummins, a temperance advocate, spoke on the evil of shouting:

If shouting were prohibited it would immediately remove the public house loafer. The only friends the 'shouters' had were the liquor sellers. More men fell into a career of drunkenness through shouting than anything else. What a false idea of the spirit of brotherhood and patriotism it was for 'shouters' to take men in khaki hotels and public houses and fill them up with liquor!<sup>9</sup>

Another public meeting under the auspices of the NCWT was held in July, again presided over by Emily Dobson, who discussed the efforts made in New South Wales in regards to anti-shouting. She wanted the meeting to pass a resolution to further the cause in Tasmania but this was not reported further.<sup>10</sup> At a NCWT meeting the same month petitions were read, one on anti-shouting to go to William Hughes, the Prime Minister, the other to Senator Pearce on the compulsory closing of hotels. NCWT members resolved to go door-to-door to obtain signatures. This was the first time that NCWT members resorted to door-knocking in any of their projects and the reasons for this

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<sup>4</sup> Dunstan, *Wowsers*, p. 110

<sup>5</sup> Dunstan, *Wowsers*, p. 111

<sup>6</sup> S and B Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* (Canberra, 1980) p. 100

<sup>7</sup> *Mercury* 30 June 1917, p. 9

<sup>8</sup> *Mercury* 30 June 1917, p. 9

<sup>9</sup> *Mercury* 30 June 1917, p. 9

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Post* 2 July 1917, p. 2

extraordinary effort are not obvious. WCTU members door knocked to obtain signatures for suffrage petitions and the WHA door knocked to obtain signatures for sanitation petitions. The NCWT did not usually go to such efforts.

In December 1917 the first Local Option Poll was held in Tasmania.<sup>11</sup> Local option was designed to allow individual communities the right to limit alcohol licences. This was seen as a first step towards achieving a total prohibition in Tasmania and was desired by the WCTU. The poll was not successful, but its failure did not dissuade the NCWT from all temperance activity. The Council noted in 1918 that an anti-shouting petition had been sent to every minister of religion and warden in Tasmania and these had been extensively signed.<sup>12</sup> The Council reported that, 'steps were taken to close hotels while transports were in port, but before they could approach the Minister of Defence a law to the effect was proclaimed.'<sup>13</sup> The Council then focused its efforts on the anti-shouting bill. In June 1918 the NCWV presented a 50,000 signature petition asking for anti-shouting regulations or legislation to Prime Minister Hughes. This was in conjunction with a NSW petition presented the previous year and the Tasmanian petition to be presented later.<sup>14</sup> At the annual congress for 1919 it was noted that from 1 July America would commence total prohibition and it was suggested Tasmanian women ask the American Anti-Shouting League to open an office in Tasmania as they were doing in New Zealand and Melbourne; the NCWT carried this motion unanimously.<sup>15</sup> This League was never opened in Tasmania. The Anti-Shouting bill was never successful in Tasmania and after the war ended the impetus for it no longer existed. The Anti-Shouting bill failed because it lacked support outside the temperance community.

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<sup>11</sup> D. Cooney, 'Local Option in Tasmania: The Temperance Question 1884-1908' Unpublished BA Hons Thesis, University of Tasmania, 1973, p. 71

<sup>12</sup> There is no record of any petition being presented to the Tasmanian parliament from the National Council of Women from 1914 till 1920. *Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament*, Abstract of Petitions, 1914-1920

<sup>13</sup> *Mercury* 27 February 1918, p. 7

<sup>14</sup> *Mercury* 5 June 1918, p. 3

<sup>15</sup> *Mercury* 1 March 1919, p. 5



## Censorship

Between 1914 and 1920, Frances Edwards and Edith Waterworth, both National Council members, became leaders in the fight for tighter film control. In 1916 Edith Waterworth published a letter in the *Mercury* expressing her view that the picture show problem had reached a level where it could no longer be ignored by a moral society. She cited a film she had recently seen which had been 'five reels of sordid, inartistic, stupid immorality.'<sup>16</sup> In December representatives from women's societies attended a meeting to discuss film censorship. Clio reported that there was 'unanimity as to the need for something to be done, and at once preliminary steps were taken towards the forming of a women's association to deal with the matter.'<sup>17</sup> In January 1917 the Federation of Women's Societies for Film Censorship (FWSFC) was born out of the fifteen women's societies represented which were: NCWT, WCTU, Empire Trading Defence Association, Bush Nursing Association, District Nursing Association, Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Young Women's Christian Association, Girls' Friendly Society, Mothers' Union, Liberal League, Liberal League Girls' Club, Race Preservation Committee, Girls' Industrial School, Women's Health Association and Australian Women's Association.<sup>18</sup> The President of the new FWSFC was Edith Hall, a National Council member (see chapter ten), with Edith Waterworth as secretary. A deputation was sent to Premier Lee but Edith Waterworth warned the FWSFC women that they had a reputation for 'having a lot to say with nothing in it.' A deputation was only going to be successful if they had a reasoned argument and appointed speakers, and Edith Hall, Edith Waterworth, Emily Dobson and Amy Chapman, all from the National Council.<sup>19</sup>

Three days before the deputation a Federal Board of Censors was appointed for the establishment of commonwealth censorship of all imported films, but the deputation still met with Lee. Emily Dobson spoke on behalf of the FWSFC and also as a 'woman and mother'.<sup>20</sup> She gave a classic expediency feminist point of view, claiming that 'the training of the young was women's work: they were in much more intimate association

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<sup>16</sup> *Mercury* 6 June 1916, p. 6

<sup>17</sup> *Mercury* 16 December 1916, p. 10

<sup>18</sup> *Mercury* 13 January 1917, p. 5

<sup>19</sup> *Mercury* 6 February 1917, p. 6

<sup>20</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1917, p. 3

with children than men ever were, and for that reason they understood better the youthful mind, and the influences that were calculated to harm it'.<sup>21</sup> The deputation asked that a state censorship board be established and women be appointed to sit on that board. Lee was not receptive. He stated that as the federal board had been established, a local board would be 'unnecessary and in danger of causing overlapping and duplicating work.'<sup>22</sup> The deputation was unhappy with the Lee's remarks and still thought the local board was necessary.<sup>23</sup>

Public opinion was split on the censorship issue; while the value of the FWSFC was accepted by some it was also seen as 'unnecessary and interfering'. Some people thought that films did not lead to sexual immorality. While films had only been common for a few years, sexual depravity had a long history. Some people expressed confusion at the censorship issue: 'I must say I have never seen any immoral pictures [but] I have seen many I don't like.' Letters were published in support of Lee, one saying that his 'position in power is to administer justice to all, not to a party, or a section of a handful in number, who take upon themselves the post of dictator, as ... what pictures should be screened.'<sup>24</sup> The FWSFC, representing fifteen of Tasmania's most influential women's organisations, was not a 'handful' of the community nor were they dictating the policy of the government in regards to film censorship. The National Council won very few victories in the work it undertook and film censorship was one of these victories. It was certainly an exaggeration to claim the FWSFC was acting as 'dictator' in asking for film censorship.

NCWT delegates to the 1917 congress discussed the censorship problem and the failure of the deputation to Lee. Emily Dobson claimed Lee 'seemed to think that the monetary loss to the picture proprietors was greater than the loss of children's souls.'<sup>25</sup> This comment caused some concern. Edith Waterworth, speaking at a FWSFC meeting said it was alleged that this comment had been made but not at any of the meetings she attended.

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<sup>21</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1917, p. 3

<sup>22</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1917, p. 3

<sup>23</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 22 February 1917, p. 9

<sup>24</sup> *Mercury* 2 March 1917, p. 6; 23 April 1917, p. 3; 15 March 1917, p. 3

<sup>25</sup> *Mercury* 20 March 1917, p. 8

Alicia O'Shea-Petersen informed the meeting that the comment had been made at a National Council meeting, but did not name Emily Dobson as the orator.<sup>26</sup> This was another example of the emotive, provocative remarks that Emily Dobson was prone to make, often to the detriment of her cause.

Emily Dobson suggested to the congress that they attempt to meet with the theatre owners and see if they could come to an agreement.<sup>27</sup> Clio reported on the National Council meeting and spoke in favourable terms on the work and wishes of the Council in trying to establish state based censorship. She stated that the petition prepared by the FWSFC to be sent to parliament had been signed by the presidents and secretaries of women's societies around Tasmania which numbered many thousands of signatures.<sup>28</sup> This statement was probably exaggerated.

A second deputation waited on the premier in May 1917 and again the outcome was seen as less than satisfactory, although the *Mercury* noted that it was 'perhaps as satisfactory as was to be expected'.<sup>29</sup> Lee asked the delegation to test the federal censorship for one month, and if after this time the federal board was not acting as it should, he promised to introduce a bill into parliament for a state censorship board at Parliament's next sitting. Lee visited the federal censorship board and decided as they were not thorough enough he would introduce a bill into parliament. The federal board had too many films to review and based its decisions on the synopsis provided with the films; it had no jurisdiction over locally produced films. Neither house of parliament seriously questioned the need for a local censorship body and the bill was passed.<sup>30</sup> Tasmania became the second Australian state to introduce a censorship body and was the first state to do so by statutory authority.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Mercury* 29 May 1917, p. 6

<sup>27</sup> *Mercury* 20 March 1917, p. 8

<sup>28</sup> *Mercury* 21 April 1917, p. 10

<sup>29</sup> *Mercury* 14 May 1917, p. 4

<sup>30</sup> Petrow, 'Leading Ladies', p. 79

<sup>31</sup> I. Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia* (St Lucia, 1978) p. 58

In February 1918 the local censorship board was appointed but whether this was in response to pressure by the women was not made clear. The board included: Mr Mc Coy (Director of Education), Mr Andrewartha, Dr. Park (Chief Health Officer of the State), Mr Tudor (Health Department), Mrs W. Taylor and Edith Waterworth. The FWSFC had been successful in obtaining the two women on the board it desired. The appointment of this board provoked a deputation of protest from representatives of the picture industry in Tasmania; they were in favour of a sole federal board and considered new regulations 'tyrannical and quite unreasonable'.<sup>32</sup> This opposition was said to be 'forceful and continuous'.<sup>33</sup>

Edith Waterworth reported in December to a meeting of the Women's Health Association that since April 1918 there had been 1,680 films registered with the Tasmanian board and of these, thirty-six were screened, two were not registered, three were registered only after alterations were made, and six films were withdrawn voluntarily before screening. She told the meeting that, 'From this it would be seen the board was not such a terrible thing after all'.<sup>34</sup> This was not the view of the picture proprietors. Under pressure from them, the House of Assembly debated the suggestion that the state censorship board primarily duplicated the work of the federal board and was superfluous. This was found to be the case and the motion was carried; Premier Lee discontinued the local body.<sup>35</sup>

This did not put an end to the censorship question because as previously discovered the federal censorship body did not adequately censor all films. In 1919 Emily Dobson spoke to the National Council on how regrettable it was that all state censorship had been abolished. The meeting resolved to ask the Picture Managers' Association for a conference with representatives to discuss immoral pictures.<sup>36</sup>

In 1920 the Council debated the merits of a film called 'Damaged Goods'. Emily Dobson said the film led to young people having less regard for modesty than was

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<sup>32</sup> *Mercury* 26 March 1918, p. 7; Petrow, 'Leading Ladies', p. 80

<sup>33</sup> *Mercury* 26 March 1918, p. 7

<sup>34</sup> *Mercury* 14 December 1918, p. 11

<sup>35</sup> Petrow, 'Leading Ladies', p. 81

<sup>36</sup> *Mercury* 20 May 1919, p. 3

compatible with a strong moral character. Edith Waterworth, however, supported the film. She believed, 'it was a picture that carried a very direct lesson to the young mind, and was of incalculable value in suppressing those vices which humanity found it so hard to cope with.'<sup>37</sup> Disagreement in this area did not change the FWSFC's desire to have a censorship body in Tasmania. In March 1920 another deputation met with the Lee to demand the reinstatement of the local censorship board. Apparently Lee was 'taken aback by the ferocity of the deputation's demands',<sup>38</sup> and passed the matter along to Cabinet that afternoon where it was decided that 'the board of censors would be reconstituted as soon as possible to deal with other pictures likely to come into the state'.<sup>39</sup> The representatives of the film proprietors again pressed their case to Lee but he held firm. The FWSFC had been successful and there was apparently a noticeable change in films screened: 'the formation of moving picture censorship has resulted in a palpable improvement in the class of plays screened for the amusement of the public, so far as implies to immoral suggestiveness than formerly prevailed.'<sup>40</sup>

The censorship victory was a tangible achievement for the NCWT and the appointment of women onto the censorship board was similarly a genuine achievement. This is the first example of women being included on boards other than in educational or charitable institutions in Tasmania.

But why was the FWSFC successful in this instance when the National Council had not achieved genuine success in any of its endeavours? This was primarily due to timing and a general trend in Australia towards censorship. Like the Tasmanian state franchise which was granted to women shortly after the federal franchise was bestowed, the Tasmanian censorship board was established in conjunction with the Federal censorship board. The Tasmanian board was to duplicate some of the Federal board's work but it was not an original idea. The Tasmanian board was an extension of the Federal board. The women were not asking for something radical or unheard of and it was not going to

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<sup>37</sup> *Mercury* 17 February 1919, p. 6

<sup>38</sup> Petrow, 'Leading Ladies', p. 81

<sup>39</sup> *Mercury* 6 March 1920, p. 7

<sup>40</sup> *Mercury* 12 June 1920, p. 10

alter the status quo in society. It was also not expensive to establish and was relatively easy to run. Also the FWSFC was a much larger organisation than the National Council and included the most influential women's organisations of Tasmania, which were committed to serious work. Censorship was not a woman's issue. It was about the safeguarding of children and this could appeal to both men and women. Those opposed to censorship were primarily the theatre owners who had vested interests in freedom of the films screened. By conceding the FWSFC request for a censorship body, the Premier Lee was granting something to the women's movement but was also showing an interest in the well-being of children.

### **Civic Rights**

Australian women began to campaign for citizenship and civic rights during the 1880s and 1890s. The Tasmanian WCTU started to campaign for the suffrage in 1893 but this was from a desire for temperance rather than equal citizenship for women. Tasmanian women began fighting for civic rights somewhat later. Civic rights broadly referred to 'membership of a political community' but in the late nineteenth century there was no definition of 'citizenship' in law. All people born in the British Empire, men and women, were classed as 'subjects' and not citizens.<sup>41</sup> Lake notes that post-suffrage feminists were 'enthusiastic, even exemplary citizens; they gloried in the new possibilities of civic and political life and effectively blurred the boundaries between the two. Citizenship was a practice that was valued in itself, not merely as a means to other ends.'<sup>42</sup> Edith Waterworth spoke on these matters to the National Council and drew attention to the fact that women should be sitting in parliament and that this was not a party political matter.<sup>43</sup> She pressed this point because the National Council had a policy of non-involvement in any matter that involved party politics and would pass matters to other, more suitable organisations.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> H. Irving, 'Citizenship' in B. Caine (ed.), *Australian Feminism: A Companion* (Melbourne, 1998) p. 25

<sup>42</sup> M. Lake, *Getting Equal: A History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, 1999) p. 139

<sup>43</sup> *Mercury* 1 March 1919, p. 5

<sup>44</sup> *Mercury* 4 March 1916, p. 7

The movement for women's full civic rights came at the same time as the ICW petitioned the newly formed League of Nations commission at the peace conference in 1919 and placed four recommendations before it. They asked that one, women be eligible to sit on all bodies and hold all offices set up by the League; two, all nations entering the League suppress all forms of the white slave traffic; three, the principle of women's suffrage be recognised and four, that an international bureau of education and health be established under the League. Each of these requests was agreed to with the exception of the international education bureau, but the ICW intended to pursue this matter further.<sup>45</sup> With the success of the ICW, Tasmanian women were inspired to make some requests of their own.

The first evidence of Tasmanian women becoming interested in equal citizenship and civic rights was in November 1918 when it was noted in the NCW minute books that the Council, the WCTU and the Child Welfare Association had decided to join forces with the Women's Health Association in its efforts to gain full civic rights for women.<sup>46</sup> In 1919 the conference was held. This included representatives from the National Council, Women's Health Association, Mothers' Union of Tasmania, Child Welfare Association, and Bush Nursing Association. These organisations created a programme of over thirty areas to which their energies would be devoted under the broader headings of Education, Public Health and Social and Moral Questions (the full programme is included in appendix one).<sup>47</sup> The next day this coalition sent a deputation to Premier Lee, but spoke on so many and varied problems that their message became confused. Although the Premier was civil to the women he made it clear that he did not agree with many of their statements. Edith Waterworth asked for full civic rights for women and for them to be given the same opportunities as men. She mentioned the suffrage which Tasmanian women had gained many years ago but she said:

They had to confess to having done very little with it. They had allowed themselves to be absorbed into the political parties of men, and had helped to

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<sup>45</sup> *Mercury* 17 June 1919, p. 6

<sup>46</sup> *Mercury* 14 November 1918, p. 2

<sup>47</sup> *Mercury* 29 July 1919, p. 5

elect them to parliament, expecting them to see with women's eyes and do women's work with enthusiasm, but they had been disappointed, and they realised that there were fundamental differences in the sexes which would always prevent men from understanding the women's point of view.<sup>48</sup>

In his reply the premier noted that many of the issues raised were not a matter for state government but local or city councils. He went on to say, 'he might be told that he was old fashioned but he had always believed that the proper sphere of women was in the home'.<sup>49</sup> He blamed many of society's problems on the fact that girls were not trained properly for motherhood and wifehood and said if this problem was rectified then other problems would disappear. He stated clearly that 'the solution was to educate women in homework'.<sup>50</sup> The deputation was not satisfied with this reply. Lee was stating a view similar to that espoused by expediency feminists and Emily Dobson with her desire for domestic education. The National Council was conservative in its activities. While it wanted women to enjoy the rights given to men the Council believed the woman's finest position was as wife and mother. Lee's words were found to be patronising by some National Council members, which appears to have been a contradiction with Council ideology. Perhaps it was his accusing and patronising tone that the women found affronting. Emily Dobson was not noted as present at the deputation and her thoughts on this topic are not known but perhaps she was more in touch with the general thinking in this area than the more radical National Council members like Edith Waterworth.

Frances Edwards (see chapter ten) published a letter the following day expressing her outrage: 'the attitude taken by the premier ... was pitiful in the extreme. His rudeness to one of the speakers was inexcusable ... the narrowness of the premier's outlook was voiced in the old "gag" that women should remain in their homes, look after the comfort of their men folk, [and] bring up their daughters to do the same.'<sup>51</sup> Lee had promised to put the matter of full civic rights for women before cabinet so the coalition had to wait. In 1920 they were still waiting. It was stated in the report of the NCWT 1920 annual

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<sup>48</sup> *Mercury* 30 July 1919, p. 6

<sup>49</sup> *Mercury* 30 July 1919, p. 6

<sup>50</sup> *Mercury* 30 July 1919, p. 6

<sup>51</sup> *Mercury* 30 July 1919, pp. 3 and 6



congress that in the previous year, deputations had been formed to urge upon the authorities the necessity of changing the sex inequalities in criminal law. A change had been secured in that the notifying of a criminal assault was extended to twelve months.<sup>52</sup>

In October 1920 Edith Waterworth responded to a letter in the *Mercury* by Mr Oldham, a Hobart City Councillor who made a joke out of the coalition's desire for full civic rights. The letter gives a rare insight into the depth of frustration felt by women, who by law were not equal citizens. Edith Waterworth challenged Mr Oldham to put himself into women's place:

Let me ask him [Mr Oldham] to place himself in our position – in a world governed by the other sex – and realise what a joke it is. Let him imagine himself with a pet project or two, which he finds it impossible to induce his women legislators to agitate themselves about; let him realise the time and energy, the cudgelling of brains necessary to bring the views of the other sex before the one that is in power, and he will perhaps see that the joke is a little one sided.<sup>53</sup>

Edith Waterworth and Frances Edwards were passionately involved in the fight to establish full civic rights for women. They were National Council members but did not necessarily speak for the Council and were perhaps the closest Tasmania had to public sphere feminists. In the following years the National Council did not return to the issue of civic rights for Tasmanian women. Perhaps the Council's silence on this issue shows a lack of support, a lack of desire to have women in parliament and on governing boards? Or perhaps it was not part of the Council's (or Emily Dobson's) agenda at that time? As mentioned the National Council was a conservative body and was not interested in challenging the status quo. The Council believed that first and foremost they were wives and mothers. This was not necessarily a contradiction to wanting civic rights. As with winning the franchise the Council would have believed that as mothers it was their highest calling and responsibility to care for the morality, social justice, health and

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<sup>52</sup> *Mercury* 17 February 1920, p. 8

<sup>53</sup> *Mercury* 21 October 1920, p. 3

education of the state. Edith Waterworth and Frances Edwards may have seemed somewhat out of place in the National Council. The Council was the largest and most publicly visible women's organisation in Tasmania; it was probably prudent for aspiring women to be linked to this forceful but non-radical organisation.

## SUMMARY TO PART II

Between 1914 and 1920 the Council discussed how to educate, train and locate women on the land; it believed that some aspects of farm work were particularly suited to women. This project was not successful in Tasmania but that was partly due to the failure of the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917. If conscription had been successful in Australia then the need for women to go on the land would have drastically increased, as it did in Britain and elsewhere in the British Empire.

During the war years the NCWT became interested in temperance when it had not previously been involved in this area. The WCTU was the predominant women's temperance organisation in Tasmania and left little scope for other groups. Many National Council members would have been unwilling to 'sign the pledge' and become teetotal in order to join the WCTU. During the war the need to institute firmer temperance legislation was accepted by various community organisations including the NCWT. It was not interested in prohibition and did not discuss local option as a goal. The Council was concerned with limiting the drinking of servicemen and with this aim in mind pursued anti-shouting, six o'clock closing and the closing of public houses while transports were in harbour. The National Council supported the temperance community in these goals but none of them were achieved.

The National Council's work in other areas achieved greater success. Its work to establish policewomen and to create censorship in Tasmania was successful, but censorship at least was not solely the work of the Council. Policewomen were a growing reality in the British Empire; women's organisations were progressively calling to have women appointed to the police force, and as many were expediency feminists, they want this not as an equal opportunity career, but in a hope to better protect women and children. Women were thought to be more nurturing and were more suited to this role than men.

The campaign for film censorship was the largest programme the NCWT undertook during the war years. But this campaign was organised with the National Council in a

supporting role. The censorship dispute was Edith Waterworth's battle. The National Council helped to form the Federated Women Societies for Film Censorship. This body lobbied the Premier successfully and film censorship was created in Tasmania with women represented on the board. This was a remarkable achievement for Tasmanian women as they had been able to influence parliament to create and maintain the censorship board (although with one setback) and for the first time women were included on a board that was not for a philanthropic organisation.

The final area in which the National Council made a significant contribution during the First World War was in the desire to have full civic rights for women. But in this area the Council was again unsuccessful in achieving any tangible results. The main proponent of civic rights for women was again Edith Waterworth who came into prominence during the war years. She was a member of the National Council but was more vocal. Some of women's progress in this period was due to her instigation in regards to film censorship, and her desire to have full civic rights for women which was supported by the National Council but to what extent is unknown. Emily Dobson made it clear in 1910 that she did not believe women should ask for seats in parliament; whether this view had changed by 1919 is unknown as she stayed silent on this issue.<sup>1</sup>

The National Council's war activities were strikingly different from other women's organisations at the time. Unlike the Red Cross, the National Council did not spend time assisting the fighting men in practical ways but tried to better society at home. Its desires to put women on the land, institute policewomen, film censorship and curb male drinking habits were all designed to elevate Tasmanian society. The Red Cross was caring for Tasmanians abroad; the National Council worked in more obscure areas, but from the same desire to improve society.

The NCWT did change during this period. It can be suggested that its interests changed, which perhaps coincided with the lessening of Emily Dobson's influence. Edith

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<sup>1</sup> *Mercury* 19 February 1910, p. 8

Waterworth had more success than Emily Dobson. Her concerns were actually for all Tasmanian women. She wanted children protected from inappropriate films and she wanted women represented as citizens with full civic rights. Both film censorship and civic rights for women were on going during the 1920s and 1930s and will be discussed further in part three.

On the 'eleventh day of the eleventh month in the year 1918,'<sup>2</sup> four and a half years of war had ended. When the news reached Tasmania that the armistice had been signed and the war was over people celebrated as they did all over the British Empire. In Hobart church bells rang, a gun was fired three times and bonfires sprang up. People came rushing in from the suburbs and the city celebrated until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. The next day was a public holiday and people started celebrating again.<sup>3</sup> The war had changed the world and there was no going back. Out of the new world, the 'new woman' had begun to emerge. This change was categorised by Dulcie Deamer, the 'Queen of Bohemia', in her autobiography:

The First World War had happened: a vortex of violent change. For us a sudden forced growing up, a stepping out of national kindergarten-hood. Then victory, the tensions over, the out-of-school feeling, and our share of the lovely, irrational, general conviction that everything was now going to be good—oh.<sup>4</sup>

The end of the war created euphoria, a feeling of freedom and for some women it created a feeling of liberation. The National Council tried to resist that change but also welcomed and encouraged changes in the position of women in Tasmania.

This period was the beginning of a new era in women's history. In 1914 the first wave of feminism theoretically ended in the western world. However, it can be argued that from 1914 Tasmanian women utilised the franchise and began to be seen as equals in the public sphere for the first time. Between 1920 and 1939 the Council witnessed changes

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<sup>2</sup> L.L Robson, *Australia in the Nineteen Twenties* (Melbourne, 1980) p. 1

<sup>3</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 14 November 1918, p. 9

<sup>4</sup> P. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *The Queen of Bohemia: the autobiography of Dulcie Deamer* (St Lucia, 1998) p. 75

to the status of women in society, but how much it had to do with these changes is problematic.